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**The Rugby Players Association's Benevolent Fund:**

**A Sociological Study of the Development of a Social Integration Discourse in Rugby Football.**

**LINDSEY EUGENE GASTON**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

**2013**

### **Abstract:**

This thesis examines how player welfare and post-athletic retirement preparation is discussed by both professional rugby union athletes who play in the English Premiership and the Board of Trustees of the Rugby Players' Association's (RPA) Benevolent Fund, the non-profit division of the trade union which represents the employment and welfare interests of professional rugby union players in England. A career in professional sports is one that is uncertain and unpredictable (Roderick 2006a; McGillivray et al. 2005). A consequence of rugby union transitioning into a professional format on 26 August 1995 was that rugby union became a stand-alone career. Along with the transition in employment structure, the athlete became bigger, faster and stronger (Olds 2001; Norton and Olds 2000). This resulted in an increase of injury severity (Kaplan et al. 2008; Brooks and Kemp 2008; Bathgate et al. 2002; Garraway et al. 2000).

In an effort to address the growing concern of injury severity and injury induced retirement, the RPA created the Benevolent Fund in 2001. The Foundation was given the remit to provide assistance to professional rugby union players during times of injury or illness, which included programmes that assisted with medical treatment, rehabilitation, counselling and direct financial assistance. To specifically address the growing numbers of players being forced to retire due to injury, the RPA commenced its 'Life After Rugby' programme, which provides educational opportunities that helps athletes to acquire alternative careers.

The data gathered in this research shows, with the assistance of Levitas's discourse models (2005, 2004, 1996a, 1996b, 1989), that there is a mixed level of involvement amongst rugby players in retirement preparation. It also underscores that players' understanding of their risk of becoming 'socially excluded' – a prevailing concern of the RPA's Benevolent Fund – is varied. The data shows that players who have

spent more time as professional athletes are more likely to mirror the language used by the RPA to describe their policy objectives than those who have just recently started their professional sporting career. Early career rugby players are aware of the risk of injury, but they tend to ignore the possibility that it could happen to them personally. This research highlights the RPA's successes with senior players but identifies the need for the RPA to modify their approach so as to encourage earlier adoption of the 'Life After Rugby' scheme by players just starting their career in professional sport.

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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution.

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**Uri, Vinciri, Verberari, Ferroque Necari.**

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

#### 1.1 Introducing the Thesis

This thesis explores how player welfare and post-athletic retirement preparation is discussed by the Board of Trustees of the Rugby Players' Association's (RPA) Benevolent Fund and current professional rugby union athletes. It draws upon data collected on elite players and directors at the RPA, using interviews as a primary data gathering method. Fundamentally, the research scrutinises RPA provisions and, analysing the discourses offered to players at various career stages, asks how and if those provisions can be modified to more effectively prepare players – and particularly those affected by career ending injury – for retirement. To give some initial background, the RPA's Benevolent Fund was established in 2001 with the mission to provide assistance to professional rugby union players who are forced to retire as a result of injury or illness. While the majority of athletes do not experience the difficulties of being forced to 'prematurely' retire through injury, there are growing numbers of rugby union players who must deal with the realities of a career ending injury. When severe injury occurs, the RPA aims to deliver mechanisms of care to players, funded through its Benevolent Fund. In doing so, the RPA provides assistance with medical treatment, rehabilitation and counselling in addition to direct financial assistance. Furthermore, they provide opportunities to retrain into alternative careers. As such, the Benevolent Fund is a registered charity, funded through donations made by rugby supporters, corporate sponsors and professional rugby players.

In August 1995, the International Rugby Board (IRB) announced the professionalism of elite level rugby union. As a result of the transition to a professional format, a series of new financial and operational concerns emerged. There was also some apprehension around the formal welfare mechanisms – or lack thereof – that could be offered to the newly professionalised athletes. This

latter concern was pushed up the political agenda as a consequence of career ending injuries to two high profile rugby union athletes: Damian Hopley (1998) and Andy Blyth (2000).

In 1998, Damain was the 26-year-old captain of the English Rugby Seven Squad and a wing for the London Wasps, who was forced to retire because of injury. Later that year, the Professional Rugby Players Association (RPA), was created by Hopley to represent and cater to the needs of the professional rugby player. However, in March 2000, the PRA realized that players needed greater resources of care after England International and Sale Sharks star, Andy Blyth, suffered a serious spinal injury that ended his athletic career. Worse still, the injury rendered Blyth a tetraplegic and offered a prognosis that suggested he may never be able to walk again.<sup>1</sup> The shock provided by Blyth's injury – and what similar injuries could mean to other rugby players – meant that the Benevolent Fund, a non-profit foundation within the PRA, was created in 2001 to provide a net of social safety net for professional rugby union players.

The PRA was renamed the RPA in 2009, with an intended purpose of widening its membership base and further promoting the needs of players and advancing their protection in rugby union. In doing so, they pledged to provide care for athletes and employment protection during times of injury. This latter provision was particularly crucial because, since the transition to a professional code, rugby union has become more physically arduous and the injury severity has increased (Kaplan et al. 2008, Brooks & Kemp 2008, Bathgate et al. 2002 and Garraway et al. 2000), resulting in more players being forced to retire. This in turn places more need on the services of the Foundation. The work of the RPA in addressing player welfare falls in line with other sectors of society where charity has acted as a welfare provider (Gorsky 1998).

In this thesis, I explore the RPA's preparation of players for retirement through its 'Life After Rugby' programme. In doing so, I demonstrate that there is a mixed level of concern amongst rugby players on the issues of retirement preparation and their risk of becoming 'socially excluded'. My data

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<sup>1</sup> Blyth recovered sufficiently well to be able to defy this prognosis.



shows that players who have spent more time as a professional athlete are more likely to speak in ways that resonate with the PRA's policy objectives than those who have just recently started their career path as professional athlete. On the other hand, early career rugby players acknowledged abstract threats of injury but sometimes disregarded the actuality of this happening. To them, injuries existed but did not happen to individuals like themselves – as such, preparation for retirement (either through injury or other means) was a topic that they thought pertinent to address only later in their careers.

To explore how players discussed and understood their welfare issues, I used Levitas's (2005, 2004) models of policy discourse, which are unpacked and described in greater detail in Chapter Three.

## 1.2 Research Aims and Objectives / Argument

This research aims to establish an understanding of how the RPA's Benevolent Fund was created. The research also aims to comprehend and assess how player welfare-specifically the mechanisms for post-athletic retirement preparation- is discussed by the Foundation's Board of Directors and current professional rugby union athletes. In doing this, the thesis makes two main arguments. First, that the RPA recognises that pre-retirement preparation is an important element in providing player welfare. The recognition of this importance is underscored by the RPA's Board of Directors' creation of the 'Life After Rugby' programme, a scheme whose sole purpose is to provide training to current athletes, allowing them to develop skills that can lead to a career once they leave professional rugby union. While the RPA is in firm agreement with the benefit of 'Life After Rugby', the message received from the professional athletes about the programme are mixed; the appreciation for its relevance is connected directly with the amount of time the athlete has played professional rugby union. I argue that those players who have more than four years of professional rugby union experience share the RPA's perspective about retirement; by contrast, those that have less than three years speak in terms contrary to the RPA and in a tone which does not fall within Levitas's discourse classifications (Levitas 2005; 2004). This means that the RPA is experience success in

promoting their ideas on post athletic career preparation amongst senior players yet experiencing less success in doing this amongst those who are in the first several years of their career.

Second, the research shows that professional rugby union players are aware and concerned about their post-athletic opportunities and will participate in retirement planning programmes if given the opportunity. Rather than focusing primarily on developing the performance capacity of the athlete and providing care in times of injury, the concept of player welfare has expanded to include providing mechanisms to transition out of professional sport. I argue that given the experience and opportunity, professional athletes will prepare for retirement. The inclusion of retirement preparation as a part of player welfare is a result of how player welfare has evolved in understanding and as a policy.

### 1.3 Research Problem

While charitable foundations play an important role in British society, there is a dearth of research on the institution of charitable foundations, especially those that are intended to benefit professional athletes. Indeed, Anheier and Leat (2002:3) argued that more research in British philanthropy is needed: “we need to know at least as much about the British philanthropy as is known about US foundations and, more importantly, to open up a public dialogue about how it can best develop in the future”. This thesis will contribute to the current growing body of literature on British philanthropy as well as begin the discussion on the role of charitable organizations within sport that are designed to insulate the athlete from the dangers of a career in professional sport. My data will show how player welfare is discussed by both the RPA and the playing community. To do this, I will answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the social history of the Rugby Players’ Association’s Benevolent Fund?
- 2) How does the Rugby Players’ Association’s Benevolent Fund operate?

3) What are the potential contributions of the Rugby Players' Association's Benevolent Fund to the larger social debate on charitable participation in addressing issues of welfare deficit?

#### 1.4 How the Research Occurred

Preparation for this thesis started in May 2006 when I became the Executive Director of the Rider Relief Fund (RRF), the charity division of Professional Bull Riders, Inc., which is independent governing body who oversees the sport of bull riding in the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Australia. The Rider Relief Fund was created in 1999 with the purpose to provide redistributive financial assistance to offset the medical and living expenses of athletes who became injured as a result of participating in the sport of bull riding. Dr Tandy Freeman, who leads the Sports Medicine Team for the PBR, told me in personal conversations that statistically one out of twelve rides results in an injury which can end an athlete's career or result in his or her death. In a sport like bull riding, injury is highly likely and often quite severe and, as is true of athletes in many other sports, the bull rider is aware of the potential risk of injury (and potential death caused by injury) associated with their profession.

The RRF was not the only form of welfare protection for bull riders. PBR riders are extended medical insurance coverage during the time of the event; however, the structures of medical care in the United States are not consistent from state to state. As a result, the coverage is likewise inconsistent. Moreover, the PBR provided coverage does not adequately provide proper financial protection for the majority of the more commonly-occurring injuries. As a result of high rates of personal injury, bull riders' likelihood of securing additional insurance is low. Even when they did secure some insurance, the monthly premium is so expensive, the majority of the athletes could not afford it.

While the RRF was under my leadership, I attempted to create an insurance policy designed specifically for the professional bull rider. To achieve this, I approached the internationally-renowned specialist insurance corporation, Lloyd's of London. However, when Lloyd's were

presented the actuaries of injury, they respectfully declined to create a policy to protect the professional bull rider. On account of this inability to secure additional insurance as well as the limited event coverage provided by the PBR, the RRF became the primary mechanism for redistributive welfare protection during times of injury and/ or hardship.

Financially, the RRF is support by corporate contributors and private donations made by bull riding enthusiasts. As the Executive Director of the Foundation, I interacted directly with many of these dedicated bull riding supporters who donated hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to benefit athletes who knowingly and willingly placed themselves in the line of danger. My original intent of this research was to look at those who donated to organizations like the RRF and the RPA's Benevolent Fund. As the research started to move forward, I discovered that what I initially intended to research was premature, for very little had been published on this particular type of charitable organization. I felt it would have been careless to explore why people participate in a phenomenon before the phenomenon which they are participating is properly explored. This realisation about the limited amount of data changed my research interest. Rather than aim to develop an understanding of why people participate in non-profits that benefit professional athletes, I chose to foster an understanding of how groups like the RRF and the RPA's Benevolent Fund came to be and how they discuss and define the issue of player welfare.

I selected professional rugby union as the sport to examination for three main reasons. First, rugby union is a professional sport that has a charitable organization which benefits its professional players; second, rugby is a physical sport with a high rate of injury and with an increasing amount of career ending injury and third, rugby union's recent transition into professionalism and even more recent establishment of a benevolent fund allowed me to speak with the original board members of the foundation as well as founding members of the RPA. These first-hand accounts provide the basis of this research and are especially useful since they include the testimony of those who participated

in the structural change in elite level rugby union and continue to help evolve as a professional sport.

To properly come to an understanding of how groups like the RPA's Benevolent Fund emerged and how they discuss and define the issue of player welfare, it is critical to select a theoretical framework and a methodology which allows the organization and those involved to be understood clearly. In order to obtain candid responses, I employed the use of phenomenography which assisted in the identification of a central theme amongst those I interviewed (Marton 1986). From speaking with members of the Board of Directors of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, the most commonly shared experience was the promotion of the 'Life After Rugby' programme, which encourages players to engage in social investment programmes offered by the Benevolent Fund and which reduce the risk of becoming socially excluded. The approach of phenomenography led to the application of Levitas's discourse models on social exclusion as a classification tool for ensuring deeper understanding about the purpose the RPA's Benevolent Fund and their 'Life After Rugby' programme. Before I outline the structure of the thesis by providing a brief synopses of each chapter, I would like to articulate the original contribution this work makes to the field of sociology of sport as well as to the theoretical approach I have chosen.

## 1.5 Original Contribution of the Thesis

### 1.5.1 Contribution to the Current Body of Social Exclusion and Sport Literature

The current body of literature on social exclusion in relation to sport tends to fall into one of two categories: first that sport can be used as a tool to decrease social exclusion through participation (Spaaij, Magee & Jeanes 2012, Bailey 2007; Coalter 2007; Nicholls 2004; Collins & Kay 2003) and second, exclusion from sport participation based on a myriad reasons that include socio-economical, gender and geographical issues (Burdsey 2010; Thomas & Smith 2009; Howe 2008; Nicholson & Hoye 2008; Smith 2007; Atchison 2007; Burdsey 2007; Caudwell 2006; Anderson 2005; Fitzgerald 2005; Gavrran 2005; Green and Roberts 2005; Miller and Wiggling 2004; Collins and Buller 2003;

Nixon 2003; Smith 2003; Scraton 2002; Sogden and Tomlinson 2002; Carrington and McDonald 2001). The social exclusion examined in this thesis is directly linked to rugby union becoming a professional sport and how that action resulted in the creation of RPA's Benevolent Fund. Chapter Two of this thesis will provide an evidence-based contextual understanding of how the transition to a professional format posed new challenges to professional rugby including the administration of player welfare.

This transition allows for this research to contribute to two further areas of existing literature. One: social exclusion in sport can be more than just exclusion from participation in sport; two: sport as a tool to reduce exclusion. In the area of sport research, 'Social Exclusion' is traditionally used as a tool to explain how particular groups of people are excluded from participation in sport based on geography, social/economic status, racial issues, religious beliefs, gender or sexuality. This will be explored in greater detail of Chapter Four. By contrast, this research argues the position that professional athletes can become victims of social exclusion as a result of the sacrifices they make to pursue a career in professional sports. This research examines how two different stakeholders, i) the RPA ii) the professional players, speak about post-athletic retirement preparation to prevent the risk of social exclusion as a result of participating in the elite level of English rugby union.

The trustee- and player-expressed understandings and experiences were then compared using Levitas's classifications to establish the most commonly-shared descriptions. These common descriptions help in turn to identify the essence, or 'shared outcome space', of player welfare within the format of professional rugby union. From the interviews with the RPA, it is clear that the Benevolent Fund is attempting to prevent the dangers of social exclusion that resulted from the new employment structure of professional rugby union.

### 1.5.2 Research Furthers the Work of Levitas

The second contribution this work makes to the field of sociology of sport is in its furtherance of the work of Levitas's work as a tool for analysis in an area where her work has not been applied: the field of sport. The use of Levitas's theoretical framework allows the research to achieve its desired aims of developing an understanding of how the RPA and professional athletes speak about welfare provisions by providing a system to classify the statements regarding their views of social exclusion. As well, it allows the research to determine the most commonly-shared views through the selected methodology of phenomenography. In addition to this being one of the first uses of Levitas in the social language of sport, the ability to use her pre-established classifications of social exclusion as an analytical tool legitimises the thesis's argument that social exclusion is an authentic risk for the professional athlete. By using Levitas's framework, which specifically addresses the topic of social exclusion discourse, aids this thesis in exploring how player welfare is discussed from two different perspectives: the leadership of the RPA's Benevolent Fund and professional players. It is for that reason the research turned to the work of Levitas's models of social exclusion discourse to provide a lens for better understanding how and why the RPA's Benevolent Fund operates, and for what purpose.

### 1.6 Thesis Structure and Outline

This thesis is divided into nine chapters in addition to this introduction. Chapter Two will provide a detailed explanation of how rugby in England became a professional sport and how the Players' Association and Benevolent Fund originated. The chapter will focus on the transition of UK sports policy from an amateur centred philosophy to a performance and results based philosophy. The transition to a professional sport allowed for the creation of what I call the Quad-lemma, which led to the need to create a players' association and, eventually, a non-profit organization that existed to address the welfare concerns facing the professional rugby athlete. Chapter Three will explore how 'social exclusion' is being applied within this study; it will also unpack the three social exclusion

discourse models as designed by Levitas: Redistributive (RED), Moral Underclass (MUD) and Social Interaction (SID) (Levitas 2005). Chapter Four will explore the current body of existing literature which exists on a) retirement from professional sport, b) the risk of social exclusion which can result from the participation of professional sport and c) the intervention of not-for-profit organizations for the purposes of addressing the impacts of social exclusion. Chapter Five will explain how the empirical research on the RPA's Benevolent Fund was undertaken in order to identify how the organization operates. Briefly, this was achieved through an examination of the Benevolent Fund's language, using the approach of phenomenography. The chapter will then explain the research design as well as provide a narrative of the data gathering process, analysis and written presentation, using the principles of phenomenography. Chapter Six, the first results chapter, will present the language used by the Board of Trustees through the lens of Levitas's discourse models. This chapter will use the words of founder and acting CEO Damian Hopley to tell the story of why and how the RPA was created. The chapter will show that the Benevolent Fund was created with a redistributive foundation but, as it matured and started to address the concerns facing professional rugby players, the language and policy direction metamorphosed to include, and eventually be dominated by their current social integrationist tone. Chapter Seven will also identify and what this research is calling Non-Engagement Discourse (NED). NED acknowledges that injury could hasten retirement and that players should be prepared for career transition but choose not to behave proactively by preparing for inevitable transition. Chapter Eight will draw together the findings and discuss how future action could help improve the consciousness of post-athletic retirement as well as increase the effectiveness and efficiency of future work of the Foundation to address the risk of post-athletic 'social exclusion' amongst professional rugby players. The chapter will also discuss the value of using Levitas's theoretical framework in both practical and theoretical terms. Finally, the chapter will discuss how the work of the RPA's Benevolent Fund could impact the player welfare discussion in other sports. Chapter Nine will begin by restating the goals of the research. It will then review the steps I took to accomplish the aims of the thesis. Next, the results will be summarised in



order to demonstrate how the outcome can benefit the current operation of the RPA and other organizations that represent the interests of professional athletes. I will conclude the thesis by relating the work to practical applications more broadly, identifying future areas of research and posing some questions on which to reflect.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Institutional Changes to British Rugby Union in the 1990's: A Move Towards Professionalism**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will address the circumstances which had influence on the Rugby Union Football's (RFU) decision to abandon their amateur tradition and adopt a professional format. The chapter will first outline how sport in the United Kingdom had transitioned from volunteer-driven structures to professionally- and commercially-organised ones. To do this, the chapter will establish that a shift occurred in the institutional priorities of the British Sports Council during the 1990's. Houlihan and White (2005) and Green and Houlihan (2004) identified that during the 1990's the British Sports Council moved from a policy of promoting mass participation to a policy of advocating elite performance. The chapter will draw on several examples of how organising bodies of sport made policy changes to their respective sport to agree with the Sports Council's shift in focus. In the case rugby union, England and other Northern Hemisphere rugby unions were facing increasing pressure from the Southern Hemisphere to accept a professional format. Additionally there was a growing scepticism of the amateur values in rugby union. Both of these situations contributed to the rugby unions of the Northern Hemisphere to join the rugby unions of the Southern Hemisphere in accepting professionalism.

The second half of the chapter will address four key institutional changes which occurred as a result of the RFU's transition to a professional format. The consequence of these changes

is what I call the 'quad-lemma' of rugby union. The 'Quad-lemma' is the identification of a four step process that could render a professional rugby player excluded from employment opportunities. The 'Quad-lemma' starts off with rugby becoming a stand-alone career. This is followed with the development of the rugby academy which removed players from traditional educational and/or employment pursuits thus decreasing possible employability after playing professional rugby. As a result of the academy, the players became bigger, faster and stronger which increased the severity of injury in the sport. The increase in injury also increases the rate of players forced from the game. When the 'quad-lemma' transpires, there is risk of a player becoming unemployed and facing difficulties finding additional employment because of his lack of job skill or education due to playing professional rugby union.

The chapter will identify, through interviews with the RPA's Benevolent Fund Board of Directors, how rugby union became a stand-alone career. Roderick (2006a) and McGillivray et al. (2005) identified that the career path of a professional athlete is unstable and unpredictable. The insecure nature of the sporting career is central to the risk of social exclusion since, when the sporting career is terminated, an athlete is at risk of becoming socially excluded if programmes are not in place to assist him during that transition process. The chapter will show that the RFU, as well as the team structures, were absent of any such programmes during the infancy of the professional game to deal with the employment and welfare issues which arose as a result of the transition to professionalism. As a result of the lack of formal mechanisms of care the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent fund was created.

As a result of professionalism, rugby union clubs became commercial enterprises. To insure a consumable good, the clubs needed to develop elite level players. The need to cultivate

talent brought forth the second institutional change: the academy. This change coincided with one of the objectives of the new UK Sports Council policy of the time, which was the creation of the academy for the development of elite level athletes (Houlihan & White 2005). This section of the chapter will show that the academy structure increased the player's level of social exclusion by creating an environment which made it difficult for an athlete to find a balance between life on and off the pitch. However, exclusion is not exclusively a result of environment conditions; Hughes and Coakley's (1991) models of "positive deviance" illustrates how athletes can be willing to exclude themselves from future employment opportunities in their present-oriented focus on athletic glory. The new academy structure facilitated this focus by allowing the rugby union player to achieve levels of strength and power which may have been difficult to attain during the amateur era. The increase in athletes' size and strength significantly affected the physicality of the game. The impact of the increase in physical size is documented by the body measurements studies of Olds (2001) and Norton and Olds (2000). They argue that professionalism fostered the creation of bigger, faster and stronger athletes. Consequently, rugby union experienced an increase in the severity of injury, an escalation that is supported by the work of Garraway et al. (2000), Brooks and Kemp (2008), Bathgate et al. (2002) and Kaplan et al. (2008) who all argue for a connection between the rugby union transition to a professional format and the increase in levels of injury severity. There are, however, many possible explanations for the rise in injury reporting. While the connection outlined by the above experts is certainly valid, I also speculate that injuries were simply being better documented in the professional era. Regardless of the cause, professional rugby union players did not have formal and consistent mechanisms of care during the amateur era of rugby union. The shortage of

options for care, along with the emerging concerns that arrived with professionalism, an outcry for formal procedures to be established would soon emerge.

The chapter will conclude by identifying the creation of the Rugby Players' Association, a trade union established in 1998 for the protection of the professional rugby union athlete. The chapter will also identify the RPA Benevolent Fund's creation in 2001, and will argue that the establishment of this fund was in response to the 'quad-lemma'. The Rugby Players' Association was one of two attempts to address the growing concerns facing the professional athlete in the new commercial environment of professional rugby union. This chapter will provide the contextual setting for Chapters Six and Seven, which use interviews with the RPA Benevolent Fund Board of Trustees and professional players to investigate the purpose and function of the Rugby Players' Association and the Rugby Players' Association Benevolent Fund.

## 2.2 Institutional Changes to Sport During the 1990s

The early 1990's saw a transition in the priorities of the United Kingdom Sports Council. Rather than providing a comprehensive strategy which encouraged mass participation in sport, the Sports Council shifted their focus to the development of elite level athletes (Houlihan & White 2005; Green & Houlihan 2004). Ian Sproat, then Minister of Sport, announced in 1994 that the Sports Council would "withdraw from the promotion of mass participation and informal recreation... instead shifting its focus to services in support of excellence" (as cited in Lake, 2010: 276). The objectives of the Sports Council's new policies concentrated on the creation of institutions to assist in the development of the elite athlete and to provide government funding to those governing bodies of sport who adopted the government's new sports policy (Green & Houlihan 2004). This is important because it

identifies that sport in the UK moved from a value system of amateur/mass participation to a value system of elite development and performance-driven results. The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), for example, experienced several institutional changes as an effect of the Sports Council's policy change. In the same way that the Sports Council placed emphasis on elite level development, so did the Lawn Tennis Association. The 1990's saw a push to change the traditional culture of the tennis club and make the sport more accessible and performance driven. The Lawn Tennis Association amended their policy to highlight elite level development rather than to give prominence to the social appeal of the sport. The LTA made these modifications not only to align themselves with the wider British sports policy but also to make themselves eligible to receive government funding (Lake 2019; Lake 2008).

The same patterns followed in athletics and in swimming. Green and Houlihan (2004) identified how both athletics and swimming changed the direction of their policies to emphasise professionalism and elite performance. Both sports adopted a more corporate/professional approach. As Green and Houlihan (2004) noted in the 1998 Past Presidents' Commission from the Amateur Swimming Association:

It is clear that policy direction in swimming over the past decade or so has shifted... sport as moved from a realm of voluntary amateur activity... [and needs] to realize that, it too, is becoming a big and complicated business. (Green & Houlihan, 2004: 395)

Both athletics and swimming experienced challenges as they attempted to transition from a culture that was once entrenched in a value system of amateurism to a more corporate and professional value system.

These examples portray the shift in the Sports Council's policy towards a more formal and professional model prioritising elite performance. The next and final example illustrates the willingness of football to make institutional changes to compete internationally as well increase their participation in the commercial business of sport. Despite the differences between the two sports, the administrative and financial changes that occurred in English football are potentially useful for developing an understanding of the changes occurring in rugby union. The economic and political change in football occurred as the result of two factors: the Taylor Report and the desire to compete in the European leagues.

The Taylor Report was a government commissioned investigation of the Hillsborough Stadium disaster<sup>2</sup>. It made several suggestions for the prevention of future catastrophes. A key suggestion was to replace the viewing terraces with seats. Removing the terraces would allow for greater crowd control. Moreover, it would permit the creation of specific seating sections. This would make the sport more family-friendly since the ground could be more easily policed and controlled, which would in turn encourage the attendance of potential spectators who were previously afraid to attend a game. The desire to compete in European leagues was likewise a catalyst of major change. The creation of a new Premiership league that focused on elite talent ushered English football onto the European stage. In this capacity, it was better positioned to negotiate television revenues and retain financial rewards. The Premiership was also a significant step towards making football more consumable. The new league acted as a vehicle to reintroduce the sport to a more family-friendly and affluent audience who had been turned off by stories of violence and

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<sup>2</sup> On 15 April 1989 during a match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, 95 people died and 766 people were injured due to improper policing and overcrowding in the terrace pens. As a result of the accident, terraces were removed and replaced with seats to allow for better crowd control (see King 2002 for more information).

hooliganism in the 1980's (Maguire 2011; Taylor 2011; King 2002). King identified that football realized its commercial power when set in the proper environment: "... football could be a valuable commodity, when played in the correct surroundings and when it attracted more affluent customers than those who had attended the game during the 1980's" (King, 2002: 105). As such, the commercialisation of football rose significantly during the 1990s, and the English Football Association signed lucrative television deals with satellite television companies. Several clubs became publicly traded corporations. In Scotland, a private investor purchased 25 per cent of the Glasgow Rangers for 40 million pounds. These actions illustrated the newly-realized belief that there was a lot of money to be made in professional football if conducted in a more professional fashion (Giulianotti 1997).

What the examples above point to, is the fact that in the 1990's English sport converted to an industry based on professionalism and elite performance. As such, the transition of rugby union to a professional sport was not an isolated incident, but rather a part of a trend that was occurring across the United Kingdom.

### 2.3 Rugby Union Transitions to Professionalism

A major factor in the transition of rugby union into a professional sport was Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer's attempt to acquire a greater market share of the lucrative Rugby League television revenue. *Rugby Wars: The Changing Face of Football*, by FitzSimons (2003), provides a detailed account of how the battle for television subscriptions prompted rugby union to accept a professional model. To establish an adequate contextual understanding of the environment prior to the IRB's decision to accept a professional format this section of



the chapter will focus on two factors: the rugby unions of the Southern Hemisphere welcoming professionalism and the presence of 'shamateurism' in rugby union.

When the rugby unions of the Southern Hemisphere officially welcomed professionalism, the RFU and the rugby unions of the Northern Hemisphere were forced to make a decision to either accept professionalism or retain the original amateur format. Section 2.3.1 will unpack the chain of events that occurred in Australia and which resulted in the creation in SANZAR, the administrative body which operates Super Rugby and The Rugby Championship competitions in rugby union in the Southern Hemisphere. The actions which occurred in the Southern Hemisphere forced the IRB to address the question of a professional format of rugby union.

The focus of section 2.3.2 will be on the presence of shamateurism<sup>3</sup> (Dunning & Sheard 1979) within the amateur format of rugby union, which made it difficult for the RFU to defend that amateurism was still a core value of the game. Section 2.3.3 will use personal interviews to demonstrate that the amateur values once used as a position to prevent players from getting paid was a weakening position for the RFU.

These two sections will conclude that the increasing use of shamateurism within the amateur structure of rugby union along with the Southern Hemisphere's acceptance of professionalism all but ensured the global game of rugby union would become a professional sport.

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<sup>3</sup> A sportsperson who is officially an amateur but accepts payment.

### 2.3.1 The Rise of the Southern Hemisphere Rugby Unions

The pay-television industry in Australia expanded in 1995. At this time, it was critical that pay-television providers had programmes that would entice the television viewing public to purchase subscriptions to their inventory of programming. Rugby League Football was the most popular sport in Australia and was the preferred sport of the of the highly sought-after 18-35 male demographic, who represented 52 per cent of those who spent money on leisure in New South Wales and Queensland (FitzSimons 2003) .

Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (PBL), under the leadership of Kerry Packer, made consistent financial returns from the advertising fees Packer charged as a result of the high television ratings PBL received from broadcasting Rugby League matches. Fellow Australian-born media mogul Rupert Murdoch watched their success and was determined not to be denied a Rugby League product for his potential subscribers. On Friday, 31 March 1995, Murdoch launched a competitive sports brand called Super League in an attempt to gain a greater share of the Australian Rugby League television market. Murdoch's Super League provided a Rugby League product whose unique edges included summer rather than winter seasons and promises of better facilities and a greater global profile. Murdoch's plan also included acquiring the best rugby players in the world, which he hope would increase subscriptions to his cable channel.

Murdoch's Super League posed a threat to its competitors because of the amount of money Murdoch was willing to invest to acquire players from both codes of rugby. Union and League managers alike were concerned about Super League's financial power. The Australian and New Zealand Unions were particularly concerned that Super League was going to strip them of their most valuable assets - their international players. FitzSimons

(2003) identified the threat facing Rugby League: “Players like Bradley Clyde – perhaps the most admired rugby league forward in captivity – were apparently going to be offered salaries of up to 700,000 Australian dollars a year, three to four times what they have been earning previously” (FitzSimons, 2003: 1). With Murdoch looking to gather players, both codes were at risk of losing their talented athletes.

This is not the first time rugby union faced pressures of losing players because the game’s amateur status. In 1895, the rugby union clubs of North England broke free from the RFU and created the Northern Rugby Football Union; this was a result of broken time payments<sup>4</sup> (Collins 2009; Richard 2006; Malin 1997; Dunning & Sheard 1979). What distinguished the 1995 issue from earlier incidents was the amount of money that was being circulated. Richie Guy, Chairman of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, identified the concern that, “Even run of the mill rugby league players were being offered up to four times more than they’d been earning previously [to player in Murdoch’s Super League]” (Fitzsimons, 2003: 7). The amount of money Super League was going to invest in the new rugby league product made both codes of rugby in Australia and New Zealand concerned about retaining their current pools of talent.

In an attempt to counter Super League, the Southern Hemisphere Unions of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, came together to create SANZAR. The intent of the coalition of the three unions was to work together to create a rugby union product that would make them competitive in the commercial market of sport. At the same time that the Southern Hemisphere Unions were attempting to fend off the attack from Super League, a new threat emerged in the form of the World Rugby Corporation (WRC). The WRC, an organization

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Broken time’ was a term referring to compensation to a player on account of the loss of income.

created by Geoff Levy and Ross Turnbull and financially supported by Kerry Packer, aimed to control the global game of rugby union (Howitt 2005). It was Levy's feeling that:

It was time for rugby union to become a big boy sport. I thought if the elite level of the game could be set up into one professional worldwide competition, then it would be unstoppable (FitzSimons, 2003: 4).

While Super League attempted to acquire its players from rugby union, the World Rugby Corporation attempted to acquire the game (Howitt 2005; FitzSimons 2003). Similar to the strategy of Super League, the WRC trained its eye on the players. The goal was to acquire rugby union players and then force the Unions of each respective country into participation<sup>5</sup>. The WRC saw itself as an attempt to protect rugby union against the talent-pilfering efforts of Super League. Turnbull saw the WRC as an organization that could save the game of rugby union. He said, "Things had to change for rugby [union] and change very quickly. They either had to go fully professionally immediately to counter Super League, or they would finish up slowly withering on the vine" (FitzSimons, 2003: 8). The WRC claimed to have had signed agreements with a majority of the All Blacks (New Zealand) and Wallabies (Australia) players. The Springboks (South Africa) did not entertain discussions with Levy or Turnbull and re-signed with their respective Union. As a result of South Africa's refusal, the All Blacks returned to the New Zealand rugby union. With South Africa and New Zealand re-signing with their Union it forced Australia to reject the WRC agreement and re-sign with the Australian Rugby Union (Howitt 2005; FitzSimons 2003). With the WRC unable

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<sup>5</sup> The contracts would only become binding when one of two goals was achieved: 1) WRC has funds that exceed \$100 million (US) by 22 Nov. 1995 or 2) WRC secures contractual relationships via TV rights, sponsorships and other avenues which will finance WRC's contractual obligations.

to secure the collective control of the players, Packer removed his financial support, and the WRC essentially dried up.

While SANZAR were fighting to save rugby union on two fronts, SANZAR also created an annual competition between each country's national squads. This was called the Tri Nations Series, a competition that would receive financial support from Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. SANZAR would sign a ten-year contract for 550 million US dollars in exchange for News Corporation's exclusive rights to broadcast the event. The arrangement between the three nations and Rupert Murdoch was confirmed at the 1995 Rugby World Cup, where it was officially announced that the rugby unions of South Africa, New Zealand and Australia had become professional. The actions of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa forced the International Rugby Board to caucus in France, where representatives of the Northern Hemisphere discussed the question of professionalism.

Tony Hallett, who in 1995 had been recently appointed secretary of the RFU, warned of the potential consequences if the IRB voted against the growing trend of professionalism and remained an amateur game. Hallett said:

If the Board goes against the trend, then each country would have to answer for itself. The only choice after that is to break away and go play your own game.

Whether it is a professional game or an unprofessional game (Llewellyn 1995).

Hallett was opposed to the idea of a romantic view of amateurism compromising rugby's future. Hallett was also quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "It's not the death of amateurism, because amateurism was in rigor mortis for some time. But now we have to make a choice. Either we're going to enter into this sort of fulltime-playing, high-level stuff where it's impossible to imagine it being amateur; or else we aren't" (Thomsen 1995). If the

IRB was not willing to go along with the trend, then Hallett was fearful that the Northern Hemisphere clubs would risk weakening the national test teams through a loss of player talent. Damian Hopley also expressed similar sentiment as he reflected on this crucial period to rugby: “We [rugby union] had a threat, Kerry Packer was getting involved, [Rupert] Murdoch was getting involved, there was a real power struggle of getting players” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). If the Northern Hemisphere Unions refused to accept a professional format, they risked dividing the rugby union as they did in 1895<sup>6</sup>. Yet, unlike the 1895 decision, the core values of amateurism was not in question.

The next section will identify that the rise in shamateurism weakened any legitimate defence that amateurism was a core value of rugby union and should remain so even in the growing global world of professional sport.

### 2.3.2 Shamateurism

Collins argued that the public’s growing level of scepticism regarding amateurism in rugby union called the game’s amateur values into question and that, “Ultimately the cynicism that amateurism fostered would be its downfall” (Collins 2009: 42). The growth of shamateurism, or the act of an athlete who accepts payment while officially an amateur, significantly hurt the RFU’s amateur code defence. The Second Report to The Culture, Media and Sport Committee on The Future of Professional Rugby (Kaufman 1999) identified the existence of shamateurism; it was additionally recognized academically by Dunning and Sheard (1979), Richards (2006), Malin (1997) and Collins (2009). The RFU continued to publically support and defend the ideals of amateurism<sup>7</sup>, but all the while examples of

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see Dunning and Sheard (1979), Richard, H. (2006), Collins, T. (2009).

<sup>7</sup> See Collins 2009 for more examples.

players receiving compensation from clubs for play grew. Examples included players being offered positions in companies in exchange for their talent on the pitch and/ or receiving “boot money<sup>8</sup>”. David Barnes, former professional player and RPA Chairman; he currently serves as Rugby Manager at the Rugby Players’ Association and is responsible for player welfare and employment issues for all Rugby Players’ Association members, spoke of both activities while playing rugby union at Bath:

So if I look at Bath, they were getting boot money, brown envelopes or they were getting jobs that they really did not have to work in. That was their [the club] way of paying them. No one was officially able to earn under the governing rules of the sport. They would be kicked out and never allowed to play again (Barnes,David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Barnes identified that while he was playing during the amateur days of rugby union, players in England were being paid to play. Corporate positions were used as a disguise to legitimise payment. Barnes also identified that players received less covert payment in the form of ‘boot money’ or ‘brown envelopes’ containing money in exchange for play.

Publications on the social history of rugby union have uncovered more overt examples of players receiving payment before the 1995 transition to (Collins 2009; Richard 2006; Malin 1997). In 1988 a South African player won a settlement in court against a club when the player failed to receive payment from the club as promised (Richards 2006). Jacques Forous, former France International player and coach stated that prior to the 1995 ruling,

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<sup>8</sup> The term ‘boot money’ comes from the late 1880’s, when football leagues prohibited professionalism. It referred at the time to players who would find money in their boot after a game; the money could be viewed as a reward for impressive performance on the pitch or an incentive to win. The more contemporary use of the term is when a company pays a player to wear their product while on the pitch.

“Professionalism is here already. Maybe not in Zimbabwe or in Namibia, Spain or Morocco, but everywhere else” (Richards, 2006: 224). The 1987 test match between Fiji and France illustrated Forous’s statements. After Fiji’s 349 loss to France, the coach of the defeated team stated:

You’ve got to remember we were against professionals. We cannot compare ourselves with the materials, structures and the level of competition they enjoy. One French player earns more than we contracted the whole team. We are still twenty years behind those big rugby playing nations in terms of structure, finances and materials, and still our players are doing their best (Richard, 2006: 258-259).

The test match between Fiji and France took place eight years before the official announcement of a professional game; the Fiji coach’s statement highlights the divergence in playing quality between test squads who were operating in a professional fashion and those who were operating in an amateur fashion.

By 1995 the idea that rugby union was an amateur-only sport had deteriorated both in spirit and in practice. Not only was there an erosion of amateurism from within the playing body, but the rugby union public also recognized that demanding professional levels of dedication without receiving any form of compensation was unfair. Steve Bales’s article in *The Independent* on the topic of the demise of amateur rugby union made such a point:

“Nowadays most people, even in the so-called home unions of the British Isles, now accept that it is quite wrong to impose a professional level of commitment on amateur sportsmen” (Bale 1995).



The argument that amateurism was a core value of the game provided, for the RFU and the Northern Hemisphere, a weak position of defence against professionalism. The cynicism of professionalism identified by Collins at the beginning of this section removed any legitimate argument in this regard. The 1987 test match of Fiji vs. France provided a possible illustration of the divergence in ability between those teams who accepted professionalism and those who remained amateur.

As a result of the Southern Hemisphere renouncing their amateur status and announcing a multi-million, multi-year deal with Murdoch's News Ltd., rugby union was forced into a corner. The growing examples of shamateurism shined a light on the hypocrisy of mounting an amateur value defence. Collins noted that once they were "faced with the determined thrust for professionalism by the Southern Hemisphere nations, the RFU and other supporters of amateurism had no ground upon which to fight" (Collins,2009:204). The decision of the IRB and the RFU to accept professionalism was not an act of choice, but an act of concession. The decision made by the IRB and RFU was an attempt to reclaim as much power as possible in the face of rugby union's global transition. As a result, on 27 August 1995<sup>9</sup>, rugby union became an open/professional game and entered the arena of professional sport (Hewett 2011; Collins 2009; Richard 2006). Vernon Pugh, Chairman of the IRB, was convinced that accepting the inevitability transition to professionalism was essential to the IRB and Unions' maintenance of control as cited by Richards (2007:45):

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<sup>9</sup> Depending on publication, 26 and 27 August have both been used as the day of the IRB announcement. For the purpose of consistency, this thesis will use 27 August 1995.

Whether or not we promote it, the game will be openly professional within a very short time. If we do not participate in and direct and control the change, the IRB and the Unions as we know it may no longer be running the game.

#### 2.4 Rugby as Stand-Alone Career (Step 1 in the Quad-lemma)

Prior to professionalism, those who played rugby union for club and for country had a non-sporting career that ran alongside their amateur rugby union playing career. The IRB's 1995 decision allowed rugby union to become a stand-alone career, thus terminating the need for players to have an additional non-sporting career. Prior to the IRB decision, if a player would happen to retire, due to injury or by choice, that player would simply return to their non-sporting professional position. On this subject, Benevolent Fund Trustee Vic Luck remarked:

When the game went professional it stopped that [other additional] career. So you would be in financial services. You get a bit of leeway training two afternoons a week. It might slow down your career a bit but it would not stop you from having a professional career. Then you get injured, so you are not playing rugby anymore and you just carry on in financial services (Luck, Vic. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Foundation Trustee Mark Champion identified the transformation that professionalism had on the structure of labour and how that change impacted the future employment opportunities for a professional rugby player:

The community that surrounded the local club tended to look after injured players and work quite hard to employ them once they left. The ability to employ somebody who was part time with one foot in the community was a lot easier than it is now with someone who has been out of the professional community or working

community for ten years, being a professional rugby player. So I think most of the first team, what was then the Premier League, all had jobs. They all had roots into companies, most had qualifications, most of them were well-qualified or had good jobs or part time jobs. So the transition was much easier (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Campion identified how the shift to a professional career began to remove the athlete from the non-sporting world. This self-exclusion from the non-sporting world became exacerbated by the rugby academy structure, which increased the negative impacts of exclusion at the end of a player's career in rugby union. This argument will be fully developed over the next several sections, which collectively identifies the individual parts comprising the 'quad-lemma' – the situations which place the rugby union athlete at greater risk of social exclusion prior to the transition into a professional rugby union format.

As a result of the professionalism of rugby, the player is without an automatic career path once the rugby career is terminated. Barnes identified how the new professional game eliminated the need for an additional career:

Traditionally, and quite luckily, most [pre-professional players] were university educated. They came from good backgrounds. They had good jobs alongside their rugby careers and so when they would get injured, it would be a seamless transition. When it went professional, all those jobs dropped away. We tend to find guys getting injured frequently with nothing to fall back on (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Barnes's statement is particularly important as in it, he identified that players were not only at risk of being socially excluded, but that it was also happening as a result of the new structure of employment. The change in employment structure was also noted during the early days of professionalism in a memorandum prepared by the Rugby Union Players' Association (RUPA) - the first trade union for rugby players - for the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. The memorandum stated that players left full time occupations to pursue a career in professional rugby, at times inferring that they were pushed to do so. The memorandum also noted that younger players were entering professional rugby at the expense of their own education and/or trade and career development (Kaufman 1999). The transformation of the labour structure and the risk of limiting future skill development created the risk of social exclusion. The new structure also decreased the opportunity to develop an additional skill set that could help in creating a contingent employment path, arguably crucial to those in a career with an unpredictable trajectory.

A professional athlete's career is inherently unstable, a fact that both the new rugby athlete and new structure of professional rugby union needed to address. Similar to the situations of other professional athletes, professional rugby players now had to deal with issues relating to the unstable and short life span of a professional athletic career (Roderick 2006a; McGillivray et al 2005). Collinson (2003) and Doogan (2001) stated that the threat of unemployment provides a significant level of concern for workers. As a stand-alone career with nothing to "fall back on", as stated by Barnes, the player would need to direct their energy towards ensuring employment from one season to the next (Roderick 2006a; Richardson 2000). With rugby being a player's only source of income, each individual's performance, as well how he managed his injuries, became critical for his success in

retaining employment. Here, Eakin and MacEachin's, "'You are only as good as your last game' (as cited in Roderick, 2006a: 246), becomes an important concept for the athlete who is learning to manoeuvre through the new structure of professional sports. The athlete begins to realize that his performance, both in practice and in head-to-head competition, determines his future in the sport. In the early days of professional rugby, the player needed to transition from his traditional understanding of employment [be whatever field he was trained in] to the newly developing professional rugby union which was without structure or operational direction. In a publication about football, McGovern (2002) pointed out that the development of a professional career in sport does not follow the same career track as a traditional work environment. The remark applies equally to rugby: an understood structure exists; a player enters the academy and works up to a first team, but how one gets there, or even if one gets there, is uncertain. There is no formal structure or guaranteed process in a professional sports career; just because one has achieved entry into the first team does not mean he is sure to remain there. The issues of instability and threat of losing one's contract is ever-present, a fact that is central to Damian Hopley's story (CEO of the RPA) in Chapter Six. It is the fragility of a career in professional sport which places the athlete at the risk of social exclusion. The following sections will continue to address the new structure of employment and how the uncertainty of a professional sports career places the professional rugby athlete at risk of becoming socially excluded.

Professional rugby union requires the athletes to place all their energy, at increasingly younger ages, completely on their rugby career. This concentrated focus hinders the acquisition of non-rugby-related skills. Moreover, the physical nature of the game – particularly with its enlarged emphasis on elitism – increases the risk of injury, adding to the

uncertainty of a career in professional rugby. If injured and forced from the game, an athlete with no employable skills is at risk of becoming socially excluded.

The next section addresses the second step of the 'quad-lemma': how the creation of the rugby academy increases the risk of the athlete's social exclusion.

### 2.5 Growth of the Rugby Union Academy (Step 2 in the Quad-lemma)

One of the objectives of the UK Sports Council policy of the 1990's was to establish elite academies for the purposes of creating elite level athletes (Houlihan & White 2005; Green & Houlihan 2004). The academy was the product of desire to cultivate and develop high performance athletes capable of excelling in rugby union's new commercial structure. This spirit encouraged rugby clubs to make a concerted effort to identify and develop elite level athletes at younger ages (Byrne 2011). Hohmann and Seild (2003) contended that identifying talent at an early age could be beneficial for athlete development, which in turn could be beneficial for the club who developed that athlete.

This approach very much defines the ethos of the rugby union academy<sup>10</sup>. This shift of cultivating talent from the university system to the secondary school system showed that the rugby academy was pursuing talent at younger ages. It also provided greater justification for the RPA's concern that rugby union could limit a player's career opportunities. When professional clubs were recruiting from the university system, the

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<sup>10</sup> The academy scheme is run by the Elite Department of the Rugby Football Union in line with the World Class Performance Plan and is delivered on a local basis by the individual professional clubs. The regional Academy programme sits alongside the representative playing pathways and is athlete-centred, development-driven and competition supported... Each regional academy is accredited with an academy license based on their ability to foster an environment conducive to player development, and the underlying principles are to provide opportunities for players to fulfil their potential at an elite level and realize their dreams of becoming professional and international players of the future.

player had a university degree, which provided a foundation for a potential contingency plan if/when the professional rugby career ended. Recruiting from the secondary school level places the player at a crossroads, where he must make a decision between pursuing a traditional track of gaining skills and/or getting an education, or becoming a professional athlete. Foundation Trustee Mark Campion identified the trend of youths pursuing a professional rugby career at increasingly younger ages:

We are drifting towards people coming out of school much younger and going into rugby academies, maybe immediately after GCSEs [General Certificate of Secondary Education], not even going to A levels [Advanced Level General Certificate of Education], and being a professional rugby player by the time they are eighteen, nineteen or twenty. You can see the emergence of professional rugby players even at the international level at quite an early age because they have been through an academy process (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Foundation Trustee Luck echoed similar sentiments regarding the decision process of entering a professional sporting career at an early age: “Around eighteen, a key decision comes up: whether you go to university or play professional rugby” (Luck, Vic. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011). Yet, one coach in the professional sphere stated that the decision between going to university or play professional sport is not much of a decision:

Incredibly rarely is there a decision on the player’s part, that they put their education first, that they would choose a university course over being a professional rugby player. Generally what would be the case is a decision is to work as hard as they can during their schooling so they have the opportunity to go to university. But once their academy course is finished, they all want to go into professional rugby. I think I

only had one case of a lad that actually decided to pursue university over rugby because he wanted to go to Oxford (Anonymous Coach A. Personal Interview. 21 March 2012).

Despite Anonymous Coach A's contention that a majority of players are willing to sacrifice their potential education for the opportunity to play at the highest level of rugby union in England, Trustees Champion and Luck's sentiments are very similar to the findings of Byrne (2011) who conducted an examination of the academy structure within the Irish Rugby Football Union. Byrne found that the professional rugby career started quite young in Ireland. This means that players are entering professional rugby union with far less formal education and work experience. Byrne states:

Typically young elite Irish rugby players are recruited and immediately contracted after leaving secondary school, and for some whilst at secondary school from the age of seventeen or eighteen (Byrne, 2011;10).

The adoption of professionalism and the promotion of the rugby academy created a social transition within the playing community. Damian Hopley, RPA founder and CEO, compares the locker room composition when he was playing for London Wasps to today: "Most were public school educated, university educated. It is a bit of a generalisation, but half of the players have higher education [compared with] ten or fifteen years ago" (Damian Hopley, Personal Interview, 28 September 2011). Hopley has argued here that the current professional rugby players have fewer non-rugby qualifications than past players. It is this lack of qualifications that could stunt possible future opportunities if players do not seek other opportunities for career development.



A professional player with a university degree agreed with Hopley's observation during an interview related to this research. He contended that a minority of players are university educated and added that very few of those had education from what he referred to as 'good universities'. The decrease of higher education in professional rugby may be related to players' incapability of finding a balance between the demands of being an elite level athlete and those required to achieve a university degree or other career qualifications.

Throughout the interviews with the players, both academy and first squad, they spoke about the difficulty of finding 'balance' between the demands of committing to a professional sports career and taking advantage of other opportunities for personal development. Byrne (2011) made identical observations when he researched the academy structure of the Irish Rugby Football Union. Byrne argued that Irish academy players felt they had to sacrifice other opportunities in order to successfully earn a rugby union contract. They felt they had to place other pursuits or interests on hold and sacrifice opportunities once they accepted placement in the rugby union academy (Byrne, 2011). This sacrifice mentality was consistent with those interviewed for this thesis. Players voiced that they did not 'want any distractions'; they wanted to give '100% to rugby'; and they were 'pursing the "dream" of playing professionally'. When asked directly about the biggest concern facing a player, interviewees' consistently responded with 'not getting a contract' and 'not getting to play'. These findings agree with Collinson (2003) and Doogan (2001) who argue that losing their job is a dominant concern for employees. This prevailing concern encourages the players to focus completely on their rugby career to ensure that they make the correct impressions on those who make contract decisions. The willingness to sacrifice elements of their life, including their education and personal development, for athletic

identity and glory can be explained by employing Hughes and Coakley's (1991) concept of 'positive deviance'. Positive deviance is the concept that an athlete is willing to risk his or her body for athletic glory:

Risking one's own health in the pursuit of sporting success is likely to occur when the athletes have accepted whole-heartedly and uncritically the goals – in particular the goal of winning – associated with sport. In their work [Hughes and Coakley 1991] an emphasis is placed on the relationship between risk, pain and injury and the achievement of athletic identity. (Roderick, 2006b: 20)

Central to Roderick's quote is the notion of the athlete accepting 'whole-heartedly' and uncritically the goals – in particular the goal of winning – associated with sport'. He, along with Hughes and Coakley, is expressing a traditional sports ethic that contends that athletes are willing to sacrifice opportunities for sport identity and success. An elite athlete is willing to accept pain and injury as well as sacrifice his education and future employment opportunities for success in sport and the attainment of athletic identity. This is central to understanding the willingness of elite athletes to limit other employment opportunities in the pursuit of athletic glory. Once involved in the rugby academy, rugby can become an all-consuming environment that limits future opportunities for the professional player, as argued by Trustee Mark Campion:

It is the only community they know... they already started on a different route... yes, they may go to university, but they will really be heading to an academy much earlier. Once they are in an academy, their contact and exposure to the outside working world is not necessary. (Mark Campion, Personal Interview, 3 October 2011)

What concerns Campion is that those who are pursuing a career in professional rugby union limit possible their employment networks because of the focus required to follow a career in professional sport. The risk is that if and when the athlete becomes injured, all his professional contacts and all skills are contained within that rugby community. Campion maintains that it is important that players develop additional skills and networks outside of rugby to increase their chances for employment once their rugby career has ended.

Professional players agreed with Campion's argument; for example, Player Sixteen stated that once athletes become involved in a professional rugby union, the likelihood of seeking a university education or developing other career skills decreases:

If you have been involved in an international set up since the age of sixteen and you work your way up through the age groups, the likelihood is you are not going to university. Well, you might do a part time degree, but to primarily focus on your degree at university... is becoming less frequent (Player Sixteen. Personal Interview. 16 May 2011).

The danger lies in the lack of a contingency plan. As previously identified, the span of professional rugby career is short and can be hastened by injury. Even if a player is able to play out his career, his time as a professional player is short and uncertain, a point made by Roderick (2006a), McGillivray et al. (2005) and, below, by Player Fifteen:

It [Rugby] is a very short career. Even if you make the most of it, you will be done by the time you are 35 max. Others will be two or three years and then find yourself out of contract. It forces people to go down a path. You get all of this encouragement and suddenly you [player speaking in first tense] don't have a job and you [player

speaking in first tense] don't have a rugby career. (Player Fifteen. Personal Interview. 15 June 2012)

This statement reconfirms the above-mentioned position of Roderick (2006a) and McGillivray et al. (2005) that the professional sports career is uncertain and unpredictable. The concern is the lack of mechanisms in place for addressing player welfare as a result of the transition to professionalism in rugby.

Despite the disadvantages of the academy on athletes careers after rugby, it does promote their personal physical development of the athlete (Byrne 2011; Hobmann 2003; Olds 2001; Garraway et al. 2000). The players that participated in this research all acknowledged the benefits that the academy had on elite level performance. Statements included: "Exposed to professional rugby at an early age you just develop so much quicker" and "You keep on top of your fitness elements, your conditioning elements". However, there are negative consequences related to players becoming bigger, faster and stronger. The final elements of the 'Quad-lemma' are the increase in player size and the relation it has to increasing the rate of injury and injury-induced retirement from the new professional game.

#### 2.6 Increased Rates of Injury in the Professional Rugby Union (Steps 3 and 4 in the Quad-lemma)

On 25 August 1995, two days before the IRB announced their decision, David Llewellyn's article in *The Independent* warned of the impact that professionalism would have on injury rates in rugby union. He wrote: "Total professionalism would turn rugby into a high risk career with short term prospects for the bulk of the players and the threat of injury and a premature end for some unfortunates" (Llewellyn 1995).

Llewellyn's prediction soon would become a reality as the rate of injury severity increased in the professional era (Kaplan et al. 2008; Kemp 2008; Bathgate et al 2000; Garraway et al. 2000). One of the reasons for the increase in severity of injury was the size and power of the new professional athlete (Norton & Olds 2001). As career athletes, players had more time to train and make their physical development their predominant focus. The academy structure allowed for greater attention to resistance and power training. Will James, a lock for Gloucester, agreed the increase in body size added to the increase of injury rates (Lowe 2012). James felt that the increase of body mass in the professional era was responsible for the increase in injury severity.

James's observation from the pitch complements a large body of research on the impact of professionalism on the rugby body. Bell et al. (1993) examined the anaerobic ability and body composition of the international rugby player; Casagrande and Viviani (1993) examined the body types of the Italian rugby athlete; Carlson et al. (1994) examined the motor performance and physique of the American Rugby Player; Tong and Mayes (1997) examined the impacts of pre-season training on the physical performance of international rugby players. Norton and Olds (2000) looked at the possible consequences that the growth trend of the rugby athlete may have on the player, their fellow players and the sport. Olds (2001) documented the physical changes in the rugby union player over a period of thirty years.

The physical effects that professionalism had on the rugby player's body mirrored the effects that professionalism had on athletes in other newly-professionalised sport. When basketball became a professional sport, for example, there was a noticeable increase in the height of the professional player (Norton & Olds 2000). When American football entered the

ranks of professional sport, there was a noticeable increase in body mass and strength (Norton 2000). Likewise, rugby union saw an increase in body mass, power and strength as they entered the professional realm (Olds 2001; Norton 2000).

To elaborate, Olds documented the trends in the physical changes of the rugby athlete. During the period of 1905 to 1974 the average mass of all players was 87.8 kg (193.5 lbs). The average mass for a forward<sup>11</sup> position was 92.7 kg (204.4 lbs) and 80.0 (176.4 lbs) for a back<sup>12</sup>. By comparison, between 1975 and 1999, the average mass of all players was 95.1 kg (209.65 lbs); forwards averaged 103.7 kg (228.6 lbs) and backs averaged 84.7 kg (186.7 lbs). This indicates an increase of 7.3 kg (16.2 lbs) for all players, 11 kg (24.2 lbs) for a forward and 4.7 kg (10.3 lbs) for a back. The increases in BMI were similar. BMI results between 1905 and 1974 were 26.2/27.1/24.9 for all/forwards/back, respectively. Between 1975 and 1999, the numbers for the same groups were 28.6/30.0/26.8, which points to an increase of 2.4/2.9/1.9 (Olds 2001). Olds identified that over a period of three decades, players in both the forward and back positions increased their muscle mass and decreased their body fat percentage, pushing them further into mesomorph (muscular) somatotype or body type. Olds (2001:260) concluded his report by stating that the “standard rugby union players (body mass) are well above those of the general population of young males, and have increased at a rate three to four times faster in the last 25 years compared with the rest of the century”. Since 1975, the increase in body mass for the rugby player has increased three times faster than the normal population. This change in body mass represents a significant

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<sup>11</sup> There are eight forwards on a team. These players use size and strength to get the ball and move it towards the opposition goal-line. Forwards also are the line of defence, stopping the opposing team from moving the ball towards their goal-line.

<sup>12</sup> There are seven backs on a team. Backs provide the speed and agility for scoring tries. Backs move the ball to search out or create weaknesses in the opposing team’s defence.

alteration in the physical design of the player, which in turn produces an increase in the risk of injury on the pitch. A closer examination of Olds's work identified that players at the elite level also possessed a larger physical stature than those playing at national and state levels<sup>13</sup>. The research collected by Olds appears to suggest that rugby players have consistently become physically larger both in terms of height and body mass, and those at the elite level of rugby are, on average, the very largest. This increase in body mass has ushered in a significant increase in power and speed. The increase in strength and power resulted in greater rates of injury severity.

On this matter, David Barnes argued that, "Rugby [union] is undoubtedly a much more physical game since it became professional. Players are bigger, faster and stronger and therefore the impacts are much more intense... we are all bigger, we are all stronger. We run faster, so physics says if you are heavier and move quicker, you are going to hit harder" (David Barnes. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Garraway et al. (2000) support the claims made by Barnes when they argue that a professional player's chance of suffering injuries has roughly doubled in the age of professionalism. Similarly, Garraway et al. (2000) suggested that the increase in player fitness levels has heightened the physicality of the game, resulting in increased severity of injury. Additionally, Malin (1997: 16-17) argued that "new fitness levels and hours of body building in the gym allows [rugby union] players now to crash into each other so relentlessly... This has added to the gladiatorial spectacle [of rugby union]...". The phrase 'gladiatorial spectacle' points to the physical and sometimes violent nature of sport. Pringle (2001) also argued that violence can be an element of the

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<sup>13</sup> The average elite player weighed 98.6 kg (217 lbs), the average national player weighed 96.3 kg (212 lbs) and the average state player weighed 87.1 kg (192 lbs). Olds's research also identified differences in height; the elite player is on average 1.850 meters tall (6 feet .08 inches). The national player is on average 1.845 meters tall (6 feet .06 inches) and the average state player is 1.810 meters tall (5 feet 11 inches).

sport. Damian Hopley spoke in similar tones about how increased physicality became a focus of the professional game of rugby union:

The game became aware of its own physicality; players become fitter, bigger, and faster. The sport became collision based rather than grace and skill and all that type of stuff. The accumulation and rates of injury grew quite significantly in the first few years [of professionalism]. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012)

Hopley's words echo those of James Robson, the British and Irish Lions<sup>14</sup> team doctor, who stated that players are "too muscle-bound and too bulky", and that the current player is "too big for their skill level" (Mairs 2009). Hopley and Dr Robson suggest that players' greater attention to their physical development allowed them to develop a new level of brute force. This increased the rate of "collisions", which in turn amplified the risk of injury and added to the uncertainty of the career span of all those on the pitch.

Rugby union is an inherently physical game, and this physicality means that there is a high level of risk of injury involved at all levels (Board 2006). Rates of rugby injuries are three times higher than both football (soccer) and American football. Statistically speaking one (1) out of four (4) rugby players will be injured during a season (British Columbia Injury and Prevention Research Unit 2010). Fuller, Brooks and Cancea (2007) examined the 2003/2004 and the 2005/2006 English rugby union seasons to identify types of contact that are the mostly likely to result in injury. They found that the great majority of injury occurs when in

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<sup>14</sup> The British and Irish Lions is a rugby union team made up of players from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.



the “contact phase of play, with the main cause being the tackles<sup>15</sup> (24-58%) ruck<sup>16</sup> (6-17%) Maul<sup>17</sup> (12-16%) collision<sup>18</sup> (8-9%) and scrum<sup>19</sup> (2-8%)” (Fuller 2007: 862).

Recently, greater amounts of research has been focused on head injuries in general and concussions in sport in particular (Gladwell 2001; Marshal & Spenser 2001). Marshall and Spencer (2001) contended that concussions comprise 24.6 per cent of all reported rugby injuries (Marshall 2001); British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit (2010) presented similar findings of 25 per cent. The long-term effects from continual and repetitive head trauma are shown to be life altering. In a conference hosted in Zurich, Switzerland in October 2008, several potential outcomes of traumatic brain injuries were discussed in relation to sports-related concussions. Discussions included how amnesia and depression have reportedly been linked as a long-term result of traumatic brain injury (TBI): “Epidemiological studies have suggested an association between repeated sports concussions during a career and late life cognitive impairment” (McCrory, 2008: 80).

Further research will undoubtedly uncover more information about the long-term effects of traumatic brain injuries on athletes. This type of injury and its potential long-term impact should be a concern for everyone involved at any level of the sport. However, it should be of

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<sup>15</sup> A tackle occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground.

<sup>16</sup> A ruck is a phase of play where one or more players from each team, who are on their feet, in physical contact, close around the ball on the ground.

<sup>17</sup> A maul begins when a player carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents, and one or more of the ball carrier’s teammates bind on the ball carrier. A maul therefore consists of at least three players at the outset. These are: the ball carrier and one player from each team. All the players involved must be caught in or bound to the maul and must be on their feet and moving towards a goal.

<sup>18</sup> No official definition for ‘collision’ is provided in the IRB rule book. However, it is commonly accepted as an out-of-control tackle where the ball carrier is knocked to ground rather than brought to the ground.

<sup>19</sup> A scrum is formed in the field of play when eight players from each team, bound together in three rows per team, close up with their opponents so that the heads of the front rows are interlocked. This creates a tunnel into which a scrum half throws the ball so that front row players can compete for possession by hooking the ball with either foot.

particular concern for the professional rugby union athlete due to both the high rate of physical contact that occurs in the sport and the potential for career ending brain injuries.

Fuller, Brooks and Cancea (2007) argued that the high risk of injury is in part related to rugby union being a high contact sport, where contact between players increases the risk. Combine their argument with Olds's (2001) observation that the body mass of the rugby union players is increasing, and it becomes clear just how much impact the contact can have. The work of Fuller (2007) and Olds (2001) provides evidence to support Brooks and Kemp's (2008) argument that when physical contact is made at higher levels of momentum and with greater levels of force, the result is an increase in the quantity and severity of injuries.

The increase in injury severity is presented at the Annual New Player Induction meeting<sup>20</sup>. Damian Hopley told the incoming class of 2011 that, "One player per club will have to retire due to injury and before the [2011-2012] season even started, three had gone. We are now at 25 per cent of what we thought" (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Since that interview, a 2012 news article quoted that the RPA is expecting a significant increase in rates of injury induced retirement. The RPA is expecting as many as twenty (20) players to retire this season (2012). This is a significant increase over the typical rule of twelve (12) per season or one (1) player from each of the existing Premiership clubs per season (Lowe 2012).

The estimated twenty (20) players to retire due to injury is understandable when a significant number of professional rugby players are injured during each season. Garraway

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<sup>20</sup> A meeting hosted by the RPA to welcome new RPA members to the professional game as well to inform them about their membership rights and how to avoid some of the pitfalls related to participating in the professional game.

et al. (2000) and Kaplan et al. (2008) contended that 90% of all professional rugby players reported being injured during a season. Regardless of the potential causes for the increase in injury, the fact remains that “There has been a major increase in injury rates since the introduction of professionalism in rugby union” (Garraway et al., 2000: 352). Garraway et al. (2000), Brooks and Kemp (2008), Kaplan et. al (2008) and Bathgate et al. (2002) agree that since the transition to professionalism, injury severity rates in rugby have increased. As Brooks and Kemp stated: “Rugby union has changed in recent years because of several rule modifications and the 1995 advent of professionalism. Trends in rugby union injury epidemiology include: higher incidence of injury than other team sports, an apparent increase in injury risk in professional and amateur games since the advent of professionalism” (Brooks & Kemp, 2008: 51).

The increase in injury severity only amplifies the instability of a career in professional rugby. The upsurge of instability, combined with players’ increasingly limited skills outside the sport of rugby, only heightens the risk of unemployment once the professional sports career is completed. Without employable skills, the risk of social exclusion rises if there are no programmes to assist with the inevitable transition from a career playing professional sport to a career not playing professional sport. It is a contention of this thesis that the lack of player-focused programmes in the new professional game was the result of poor planning and ill-equipped structures of management in the new professional game. This will be addressed in the next section.

## 2.7 Professionalism Failed to Address the Needs of the Athlete

There were only 150 days between Rupert Murdoch’s 27 March 1995 broadcast of the Super League and the IRB’s 27 August 1995 announcement that the game of rugby union

would embrace professionalism. Foundation Trustee Campion described the transition to professionalism similar to a canoe going over the edge of Niagara Falls:

It was a sudden revolution; it was not a planned transference... this was not something that people sat down and said in five years' time we have a plan or strategy to be professional... I think in the United Kingdom we were riding the canoe that went over the Niagara Falls of professionalism and wonder[ing] what the hell was going on. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

The rapid rate at which the transition occurred did not allow for proper mechanisms to be developed to address the new commercial structure of rugby union. There was no clear plan for growth or evident understanding about how to transition to a professional sport. A memorandum prepared by the RUPA for the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (RUPA 1999), identified several key issues that explained the instability within the professional game of rugby union. It first identified the large level of corporate sponsorship that was expected to come with the new game, but which never occurred. Sponsors who did sign agreements withdrew their support once the contractual obligations were met, and they did not renew their sponsorship agreements because of the clubs' weak financial conditions. The poor financial infrastructure was partially due to the new professional clubs' vying for the best players by promising salaries that were unsustainable without large levels of corporate sponsorship and strong revenues through ticket sales. The rush of acquisition was done in such haste that proper business plans were not developed:

In some cases unrealistic business plans were put in place and other situations hearts ruled heads totally. The clubs' administrators and officials simply did not have

enough expertise to deal with and administer wage payrolls of between £1 million and £2 million pounds per year (RUPA, 1999:2).

The memorandum also identified that poor planning from the beginning of the professional transition of the game resulted in massive operational problems. The lack of operational structure bled into every facet of the game, including the employment rights and welfare needs of the new professional player. This lack of structure during this period of transition pointed to the need for a players' union that would represent the employment rights and welfare interests of the new professional rugby union athlete.

The memorandum further pointed out that a consequence of the rush to professionalism was a failure to provide athletes with proper programmes for transitioning from a sporting career to a non-sporting career.

The risk of high injury and lack of programmes for transitioning the athlete from one career to another became the focus of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. As the game matured, the Benevolent Fund feared that athletes, especially in situations of injury, were losing chances to engage in post-rugby career training/programmes and, as such, risked facing social exclusion.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to establish a contextual understanding of the changes occurring sport which allowed professionalism to advance in rugby union. The chapter established that in the 1990's the United Kingdom's sports policy underwent significant changes. The transition from a 'sport for all' to an 'elite performance' approach fostered an environment which encouraged and accepted greater levels of professionalism within the once amateur

dominant sports market. While this transition in policy was occurring in the UK, the rugby unions in the Southern Hemisphere were undergoing a battle for control which would eventually force the rugby unions of the Northern Hemisphere to accept a professional format (Howitt 2005; FitzSimons 2003). Relatedly, the chapter also identified that England's amateur code was being eroded by shamateurism (Collins 2009; Richard 2006; Malin 1997), which consequently weakened the argument that amateurism was a core value of the code.

New problems surfaced with the acceptance of professionalism. These problems were identified as the second contextualising feature of this chapter and were collectively called the Quad-lemma. The purpose of identifying the 'Quad-lemma' was to highlight four significant changes which occurred as a result of the transition to a professional model. Each change on its own was negligible in terms of its impact on the sport; however, once combined they produced a significant level of concern for the welfare of professional rugby union athletes. The first factor this chapter established was that rugby union became a stand-alone career path. This was followed by the contention that the creation of the academy led to the increased focus on rugby training, which allowed athletes to become bigger, faster and stronger (Norton and Olds 2000); this resulted in the increase of injury severity in rugby union (Kaplan et al 2008; Brooks and Kemp 2008; Bathgate et al 2002; Garraway et al. 2000). The chapter next identified that an increase in injury in turn amplified the uncertainty of a career in professional sport (Roderick 2006b; McGillivray et al. 2005). The increase of career ending injuries with a decrease of skill and educational development, the chapter argued, left the injured athlete at a higher risk of exclusion if he was not offered mechanisms of care.

At the advent of professional rugby union formal mechanisms did not exist to address athlete welfare, particularly as it related to the potentially negative longer-term impacts on an athlete's life. The chapter found that, as a consequence of their lack of qualifications and network contacts outside the world of rugby, ex-athletes increased their risk of becoming and remaining unemployed because of their participation in professional rugby union.

## Chapter 3

### The Theoretical Concept of Social Exclusion

#### 3.1 Introduction

As 'social exclusion' is the central concept of this thesis, this chapter is dedicated to unpacking its meanings. In order to provide a baseline of understanding, the chapter will begin by presenting the various ways in which social exclusion is defined. This will be followed by the chapter's major contributions to this thesis: a description of Ruth Levitas's framework for understanding social policy approaches and an unpacking of her three discourses of social exclusion: 'Redistributive' (RED), 'Moral Underclass' (MUD) and 'Social Interaction' (SID) (Levitas 2005). I will use these social exclusion discourse models as the lenses through which I will analyse the statements made by rugby players and members of the RPA's Benevolent Fund's Board of Directors, in order to determine the dominant discursive frame used by both parties. The discourse models provide the tools to analyse the work and ideas emerging from the RPA and its Benevolent Fund on rugby players' post-athletic career plans and the avoidance of their social exclusion.

#### 3.2 What is Social Exclusion?

The term 'social exclusion' was not actively used in public policy until the mid-1980's (Pierson 2010; Roberts 2009; Silver 1997), yet the ethos of social exclusion can be seen in the works of many of sociology's founding contributors, whose work focused on creating social solidarity (Parkin 1997; Silver 1994, 1995, 2011). In 2011, Silver contended that social solidarity and social cohesion are critical to the proper functioning of society:

Social Exclusion is a rupturing of the social bond. It is a process of declining participation, access and solidarity. At the societal level, it reflects inadequate social cohesion or integration. At the individual level it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relationships (Silver 2011:4411).



Silver was following Durkheim (1950) by arguing that once individuals or groups of individuals feel excluded from participation, they become isolated and socially excluded. This isolation/exclusion in turn threatens to undermine the solidarity of the state, thus weakening social cohesion (Silver 2011, 1995, 1994; Durkheim 1950). Jordon (1996) discussed social exclusion from a Weberian perspective and defined social exclusion as the conscious act of one group denying the rights of another group. Jordon's understanding of social exclusion complements the current body of sports-related literature, which focuses on the denial of participation. I will address this concept in Chapter Four.

Contemporary usage of the term social exclusion originated in France and was used to identify those individuals who have fallen through the safety net of the Bismarkien welfare state (Silver 1994). The term social exclusion started to be used regularly in governmental social policy, specifically in France, to describe the host of potential items that destroy the social connections that bond individuals and society (Pierson 2010).

Roberts (2009) observed the concept of social exclusion was coined during the 1980's. He notes that it emerged as a concept in the European Union during a period of growing unemployment rates in the EU. Roberts (2009:263) defined social exclusion as the process by which individuals "are typically excluded from some combination of wealth, income, employment, education, political representation and social and emotional support". This list could be extended to include other potentially socially corrosive concerns, such as poverty, lack of education opportunities, limited health services, inadequate housing and community development and absentee policing (Pierson 2010; Roberts 2009; Levitas 2005; Levitas 1996a; Levitas 1996b, 1989; Silver 1995, 1994).

Somewhat problematically, the term 'social exclusion' is often mistaken as a synonym for other social science concepts, including 'social inequalities', 'social stratification' and 'social division' (Payne 2006). It is important to recognise that these are not synonymous. 'Social division' is broadly understood to include categories such as race, religion and gender while 'social stratification' can transcend issues of race, religion and gender by focusing on partitions created by political ideology,

economic class or geographical location. Additionally, 'social inequality' refers to an individual's limited access to material resources (Jarvie 2007). It can be argued, however, that social inequality, social stratification and social division are all symptoms of the overarching 'disease' of social exclusion. In other words, social exclusion is an umbrella term that can include a multitude of configurations, such as social division, social stratification and social inequality. This umbrella understanding is supported by Madanipour (1998) who identified social exclusion as:

A multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined; participation in decision making and political process, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural process. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods (Madanipour 1998:22).

Walker and Walker's 1997 publication upheld Madanipour's contention that social exclusion is a combination of factors rather than just a single issue. They argued that social exclusion was a result of a lack of income and/or material resources that prevented an individual or group of individuals to actively participate in society. For the Walker and Walker (1997) social exclusion was a:

Comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of the person in society (Walker & Walker 1997:8).

Levitas, who has written prolifically on social exclusion (Levitas 2005, 2004, 1996, 1989), defined social exclusion in similar terms as Roberts, but did not name the elements of causation: "Exclusion is understood as the breakdown of the structural, cultural and moral ties which bind the individual to society, and family instability is a key concern" (Levitas; 1998:21). Levitas has adopted a similar position to Durkheim by emphasising the structural nature of society and the need to ensure stability and social cohesion.

In order to understand and engage with the concept of social exclusion, Levitas established three lenses – or ‘discourses’ – for examining how social exclusion was being publically discussed. Levitas’s use of the term ‘discourses’ enables her to focus on the *discussion* about social exclusion rather than on social exclusion itself. Her focus is narrowed to the discourse itself and how the concept is understood in public forums. This prevents her study from having to address massive structural issues like capitalism which, it could be argued, is the main cause of social exclusion (Byrne, 2006). This approach allows the concept to be more broadly applicable, as it highlights how real people talk about social exclusion in real life scenarios.

### 3.3 Levitas and Social Exclusion

During a period when New Labour<sup>i</sup> was the majority government in the United Kingdom, Levitas used the issue of social exclusion to examine how language affects the policy making process. Levitas’s approach provides a translation between how policy is promoted, passed and enacted, and sociolinguistics<sup>ii</sup>. This thesis will attempt a similar approach by establishing the dominant discourses of the Board of Directors for the RPA’s Benevolent Fund’s and 24 professional rugby players in order to determine how these two parties speak about a shared concern. By employing Levitas’s discourse models, the thesis will develop an understanding of how and why the Foundation established structural mechanisms to reduce the risk of social exclusion. Levitas’s models will also be applied to this thesis in order to determine if the Board of Directors’ principal discourse is in any way shared by the playing community.

By examining the player and administrative discourse through Levitas’s theoretical lens, the data in this thesis will represent personal reflection rather than a player or administrative ideology. Since ideology implies that there is an agreed understanding of the concept by all parties involved, analysing individuals’ discourse, rather than assuming that collective ideologies exist, allows for greater levels of flexibility. By definition, the term ‘discourse’ means discussion or debate, implying

some level of exchange of ideas. Since the discussion on exclusion is complex and layered, using a discursive strategy makes room for a greater inclusion of conflicting opinion.

Moreover, ideology also implies motive or a level of bias. The term is typically linked to a specific set of social values or social interests that are fuelled by gaining power or influence (Byrne, 2006). When looking at the three strands of social exclusion as presented by Levitas, we must be aware that she is not specifically addressing power relationships within the capitalistic market, which results in the issue of exploitation. This is possibly the greatest weakness in her approach (Byrne, 2006).

Functioning within a capitalistic framework, Levitas's discourse models promote employment as the solution to reducing social exclusion (Levitas, 2005). Levitas concedes that by addressing social exclusion exclusively through paid employment, the models fail to place any significance on unpaid employment (e.g. caring for children, the elderly and those in need of assistance) as a solution to social inclusion (Levitas 2005). As such, Levitas's discursive models are consistent with current social policy veins, which also appear to overlook unpaid employment as a response to social exclusion (Marston& Dee 2012). Yet, since this thesis is specifically interested in addressing the employment opportunities for retired professional athletes, speaking in terms of gaining employment is entirely relevant.

Byrne (2006) identified two other notable concerns with Levitas's models. First, Levitas places considerable importance on linking paid employment and increased inclusion; however, Byrne claims that this approach is not a new solution to an old problem. Byrne (2006:37) wrote: "[Levitas] misses the point that the demand for work in previous eras has been radical". The 'right to work' has been included in multiple socialist political agendas and has been a critical element in both Keynesian liberalism and the more conservative "Christian Work Ethic" policies promoted by Christian democratic values. Byrne's second concern was over the economic framework of capitalism in which the exclusion occurs. Byrne (2006:128) argued for social exclusion as a

“necessary and inherent characteristic” of functioning capitalism. He further pointed out that exploitation as a bi-product of capitalism is not new:

Christian democracy, non-transformational social democracy and the new liberalism all recognize that there are problems with the fundamental nature of capitalism, and with the balance of power within it of labour as against capital. (Byrne, 2006: 38).

Despite their differences, Byrne (2006:38) agreed with Levitas that exclusion is not the “fundamental nature of capitalism” but rather the social exclusion is the result “contemporary economic and social conditions which results in the exclusion”. Byrne does present a larger issue when dealing with the topic of exclusion. If social exclusion is a by-product of the larger economic model of capitalism, Levitas’s discourses fail to address properly the economic mechanisms that systematically create the exclusion. Further, if social exclusion is a necessary and inherent by-product of capitalism, social and political policy are ill-suited and ineffective approaches for enacting social change.

Noting these challenges, Levitas’s discourses still provide valuable insight into how people speak about the mechanisms of welfare. In the next section of this chapter, I will provide a description of what each discourse means, first identifying the most liberal, the ‘Redistribution Discourse’ (RED); second discussing the most conservative, the ‘Moral Underclass Discourse’ (MUD); and, finally detailing the discourse that attempts to bridge the two, the ‘Social Integration Discourse’ (SID). By the end of this chapter, the three stands of social exclusion as defined by Levitas and the notion that paid employment is a path to inclusion will be clearly explained (Levitas 2005).

### 3.3.1 RED: Redistribution Discourse

Britain, as a welfare state inherently places itself into a default redistribution position when providing welfare (Esping-Anderson & Myles 2009). This is typically achieved by collecting taxes and then redistributing to projects and/or individuals who fulfil certain requirements for receiving various forms of public assistance. Barr (2004) compared the welfare state to a ‘piggy bank’. The

aim is to prevent social exclusion through the redistribution of resources to those in need. Barr (2004) argued that the creation of the welfare state was not about creating equality, but about providing protection from the impact of social ills, including social exclusion.

The welfare state was a product of fear. England's leaders did not want to return to the depressed conditions of pre-World War II, a period which saw significant levels of social exclusion along with a lack of structural mechanisms to address welfare concerns. To prevent similar conditions from occurring again, the government introduced the Keynes-Beveridge welfare model. This welfare model established a strong governmental role in regulating the economy and ensured healthy levels of employment. The Keynes-Beveridge model understood the role of government to include protecting citizens from economic strife by either ensuring employment or providing protection during times of unemployment, disability and sickness (Mabbett 2009, Barr 2004; Taylor-Gooby 2001). This increased governmental control of the economy turned the United Kingdom into a social democratic welfare state, for whom reducing the risk of social exclusion was a prevailing concern.

Esping-Anderson (1999) identified three classifications of social risk which the welfare state was designed to address: life-course risk, inter-generational risk and class risk. For Esping-Anderson (1999), life-course risk referred to acquisition of social concerns as one ages in society, including health care and retirement issues. Inter-generational risk referred to the concerns younger generations had about impacts on their future earning potential (e.g. education and skill development which would affect life-course risks). Class risk pertained to segments of the population being at greater risk of injury and illness and thus needing more protection. Esping-Anderson and Myles (2009) provided an example of 'class risk' by comparing the likelihood of injury in relation to employment. They argued that coal miners are more likely to suffer from a workplace injury than a university professor; as such, more care is needed for the coal miner.

To address these social risks, the welfare state adopted two main models of redistribution: horizontal and vertical (Esping- Anderson & Myles 2012; Hill 2011, 2004). It has been noted that two-

thirds of the redistribution based welfare that occurs in Britain is horizontal while a third of the eligible population receives their redistribution vertically (Hill 2011).

The horizontal approach can be seen in the examples of the National Insurance scheme in the United Kingdom or in the Social Security programme in the United States of America. Horizontal redistribution typically occurs in the form of taxation of the actively employed, which is then redistributed to members of society who were also taxed during their period of active employment to subsidize their retirement and/or periods of non-employment. A pension programme is another example of horizontal redistribution, where individuals pay into a programme with the expectation of receiving redistribution when in retirement. To apply Barr's 'piggy bank' analogy, members of the labour force contribute to a collective fund - or a 'piggy bank' - so that they can receive from that 'piggy bank' when they become eligible to withdraw from the collective fund.

A problem with the horizontal approach is its failure to address issues that may occur before one can contribute to, or draw from, their 'piggy bank', as in the case of childhood poverty (Esping-Anderson & Myles 2009).

Vertical models of redistribution exist to address these types of concerns. The vertical model of redistribution employs a 'Robin Hood' approach of taking from the rich and giving to the poor. The vertical approach typically applies a progressive tax structure, which taxes those who have more and gives to those that have less or are in need of the greatest amount of care. Included in the vertical redistribution structure is the 'inter-group' redistribution scheme (Hills 2004, Anderson-Myles 2011), where one group gives to another group. National health care is a commonly used example in the literature to illustrate 'inter-group' redistribution. National health care discreetly reallocates between those who are healthy and those who are sick (Esping-Anderson & Myles 2009).

The vertical approach assumes that addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged will have the greatest impact. Korpi and Palme (1998) have argued against such an assumption, presenting what they called a "paradox of redistribution". They contended that only serving those who are in the

most need stigmatises those who receive the redistribution. Additionally, they argued that this approach hurts the public support to provide such programmes. Regardless of certain criticisms of these approaches, it is important to note that both models of redistribution exist and are addressed by those who promote and speak in RED terms.

A third model of redistribution is risk pooling, which is a hybrid form of redistribution made up of both horizontal and vertical characteristics. Risk pooling is horizontal in that the participants insure themselves against social risk later in life by contributing to a 'piggy bank' to access later in life; however, it is also vertical in that it allocates resources to those who are in immediate need. Risk pooling is effective in addressing Esping-Anderson's (1999) class risk, since those in high risk groups can participate in a programme that is designed to specifically address their welfare concerns.

Levitas's RED model is based on Peter Townsend's (1979) vertical redistribution approach. Townsend proposed that poverty was the result of having inadequate access to resources, which limited an individual's participation in society. Townsend, along with other scholars including Walker and Walker (1997), contended that poverty is a multi-dimensional social concern rather than just an issue of income. To address this concern Townsend maintained that means testing could be reduced by the redistribution of wealth, which would also allow greater access to state-provided benefits. Pierson (2010:9) argued similarly that redistribution of wealth is the only solution for addressing the social risk of exclusion: "... only through the redistribution of wealth across society as a whole, through taxation, benefits and services, will poverty and inequality be eradicated in Britain". What is critical to understand is that redistribution, if it occurs, does not *solve* the disease that causes social exclusion; rather, it merely treats the symptoms of social exclusion. Consequently, it does not provide any real solution to the social challenge.

Proponents of a redistributive dominant discourse are also massively critical of the notion that social exclusion is a result of individual behaviour. As Pierson (2010:9) recently suggested, "exclusion is not due to poor attitudes towards work or a moral or cultural characteristic that can be determined



liable for the segregation of individual or groups of individuals". Rather, RED proponents argue social exclusion is a complex and multi-faceted issue that cannot be explained by behaviour alone. RED advocates maintain that social exclusion is a systemic problem that can only be resolved by a systemic solution: state-sponsored redistribution of wealth. Pierson and Townsend both argued that a successful systemic solution to social exclusion would be to alter the social structure which delivers welfare programmes.

Levitas viewed RED as a return to traditional social democratic values, which usher in structural changes. The use of 'traditional social democratic values' is a concern because, politically-speaking, social democrats subscribe to a transformational rather than redistributive approach (Byrnes 2005). Social democrats want to appeal to the people's hearts and minds to cause transformation rather than to apply a transactional or redistributive approach in which goods are exchanged as policy. For social democrats, policy development is more concerned with developing and raising the consciousness of the populace, which in turns drives policy (Judge and Piccolo 2004). This is contrary to an approach that changes policy with the hopes that the populace will eventually embrace the modification.

With respect to professional athletes and more specifically the work of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, RED can be seen in the horizontal redistribution of resources via pension plans. It can likewise be observed in the risk pooling of the players' association, which is collected to assist athletes during times of injury, illness or hardship. Many of the established major league sports in the United States and in the United Kingdom have pension plans that provide a degree of financial assistance to professional athletes in retirement and that resonate with Barr's 'piggy bank' analogy. The RPA and its Benevolent Fund have created a 'risk pool' in which redistribution can occur, thus decreasing the financial exposure of the athlete if such a service is required.

### 3.3.2 MUD: Moral Underclass Discourse

The Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD) is quite different from RED. Rather than looking at policy or the lack of access to social structure as the cause for exclusion, the MUD approach considers the personal behaviour of the individual as the source of the social exclusion. MUD is typically described in terms of a neo-liberal political ideology (Taylor Goody 2002, 2001; Giddens 1999). MUD places an emphasis on the privatisation of public services and a free economy. For a free economy to operate, it is important that the market resists pressure from labour unions and stymies labour revolt. Subscribers to MUD also blame moral weakness of the individual/community for their exclusion. Unlike RED, MUD strongly emphasises agency over structure. MUD has created a welfare 'folk devil' (see Cohen 1973) by placing the blame for social exclusion on those being excluded. Typically MUD focuses on how those excluded are morally weak people. Commonly used examples include absent fathers, pregnant teens, young and violent offenders, each of whom are typically blamed for their own exclusion in MUD (Pierson 2010; Levitas 2005).

The MUD message is disseminated via the mass media and politicians who claim the impoverished 'want to be poor' (Cole 1993). MUD argues that social exclusion is a product of choice and that RED-based benefit programmes only encourage behaviour that leads to/secures impoverishment. Proponents of MUD argue that by providing programmes of assistance, the state is creating a level of dependency which only perpetuates and encourages exclusion. Cole (1993) expressed this attitude in his documentary, *Cole of the Dole*, in which he described people benefiting from a welfare state as existing in, "an endemic culture of no work and reliance on benefits". Moreover, he maintained that the promotion of social benefits resulted in a "downward spiral of idleness, crime, and coercion of the work ethic".

In the same vein, Dahrendorf provided a list of physical characteristics and a description of the personal motivation of those who receive assistance. This description fuels the notion of a 'folk devil', and perpetuates the idea that those who receive assistance are social pariahs:

It includes a lifestyle of laidback sloppiness... gangs that congregate around discos and the like, they are hostile to middle-class society, particular habits of dress, hairstyle, often do drugs or at least alcohol. A style in other words which has little in common with the values of the working society around. Dahrendorf (1987: 13).

Dahrendorf (1987) attempted to establish, by placing blame on the individual, that those who are socially excluded are offensive.

The MUD approach ultimately attempts to justify the elimination of assistance programmes. Criminalising the excluded potentially decreases mainstream support for redistribution programmes. By establishing a folk devil, MUD legitimatises the neo-liberal economic free market policies which promote decreasing the role of the state in welfare. The neo-liberal political and economic theory promotes the privatisation of services and, by doing so, allows corporations, rather than the government, to provide market-driven (rather than publicly-driven) services (Mabbet 2009; Barr 2004; Taylor-Gooby 2001).

Like Dahrendorf and Cole, Field (1995) supported the argument for decreasing benefits; however, unlike them, Field did not subscribe to the notion that the excluded are work-adverse. Rather Field (1995) argued that the poor are committed to work, but expressed concerns about the risk of becoming dependent on benefits. Field (1995) promoted the idea of decreasing state-led benefits and encouraging people to save their money.

To promote a pro-work policy, the current British government is in support of an 'unpaid work scheme' as a method for addressing the issue of exclusion. In line with the maxim 'there is no free hand out', the government contends that if one receives assistance from the state, that person must provide a level of 'unpaid' work in exchange for that assistance. Jessop (2003: 13) is concerned that this approach could lead to a US welfare model, "forcing unemployed into the labour market at entry-level, low wage jobs in order to expand the labour pools and reduce wage inflation pressures". Jessop argued that forcing people to perform unpaid work in order to receive assistance does not

help individuals find active and/or gainful employment thus never allows them to transition from receiving benefits to not receiving them.

With respect to sport, the athlete is not a typical ‘folk devil’, as described in the MUD model. It would be difficult to argue that the athlete is lazy and wants to become reliant on state and/or social benefits. However, as a result of the athlete’s desire to pursue a career in professional sport, Hughes and Coakley’s (1991) model of positive deviance may explain the behaviour of an athlete who would be willing to place himself in a position in which assistance would be required because of his self-assigned social exclusion. This notion of an athlete’s self-selected social exclusion will be addressed, using Levitas’s discourse, in Chapter Seven.

### 3.3.3 SID: Social Integration Discourse and Social Investment

The Social Integration Discourse (SID) represents a middle position between RED and MUD. SID focuses on three major topics: 1) unemployment, 2) economic inactivity and 3) inclusion through paid work (Levitas 2005). Like Levitas, Silver (2011; 1995) suggested that work itself possesses both social and moral benefits. SID does not distinguish between social exclusion and exclusion from paid work; rather, they are viewed as the same issue.

The SID approach was evident in two European White Papers: the European Social Policy (European Commission B 1994) and Growth Competitiveness, Employment (European Commission A 1994). The ethos of the two White Papers echoes the tenets of SID in two ways: by addressing social exclusion through providing paid work and by specifically focusing on the social investment of the individual. Education as a form of social investment can be seen in European Social Policy (European Commission A 1994), which highlights the importance of education as a tool for addressing exclusion: “failure of education is an increasingly important and increasingly widespread factor of marginalization and social exclusion” (European Commission B; 1994:58). In other words, education is essential to accessing employment as well maximising employment opportunities. Similar results were seen in several other reports, including the Borre Commission Report, the Rowntree Inquiry

(Barclay 1995), and the Dahrendorf Report: The Commission on Wealth Creation and Social Cohesion (Dahrendorf 1995). Each of these reports argues that social investment schemes that focus on providing skill and educational development of the individual translates into the greatest employment opportunities for the individual.

While RED and MUD advocates have broader views of social exclusion, SID sponsors significantly narrow the scope of the debate to paid work. The promotion of skill development and education is driven by the goal to allow individuals to acquire the best possible earning potential. Maximising earnings narrows the income gap, which supports Moffet et al.'s (1998) argument that public support for welfare assistance is linked to the degree of income separation. Moffet et al. (1998) contended that countries that have a wide gap between the lowest and the highest wage earners also have less public support for public assistance programmes than countries that have narrower levels of separation.

The issue of class separation may be a major source of MUD, as those from higher socio-economic backgrounds may not understand the structural causes of social exclusion, making them feel it is a behaviour issue. The greater the income division between the highest and lowest earners, the greater the lack of understanding for the causation of social exclusion. This observation complements Hayton's (2013) work, which examined university student-led volunteering programmes that addressed social exclusion among 'at-risk' youth in the North East of England. Hayton identified that the socio-economic background of the volunteers would have normally prevented social interaction from the programme participant. However, the programme allowed for what Hayton referred to as a 'shifting of fields', which enabled the participant and the volunteer to engage in social interaction that allowed both to develop a better understanding of the other. Consistent with this, Hayton (2013), Kenworthy (2004) and Moffet et al. (1998) all suggested that the greater the socio-economic divide, the greater the lack of understanding of the plight of others. By opening up paths to increase employment and shrink the socio-economic divide, the SID approach

could provide a better approach to decreasing exclusion and increasing understanding around case-specific welfare needs.

The proponents of the SID model narrow the solution to social exclusion down to the single issue of paid employment. Advocates argue that social exclusion can be mitigated through individuals' acquiring paid employment. However, the SID approach fails to look at the issues of inequality between workers. This is particularly true in regards to gender, where women typically get paid less than men while performing the same function. Moreover, SID inadequately address issues of class, failing to recognize that class can contribute to the marginalisation of people. Additionally, SID does not address unfair employment or hiring practices. If employment is the pathway to social inclusion, there need to be assurances that the pathway is accessible by all, if equipped with the proper training and skills.

In the context of professional sport, the goal of the SID model is to assist athletes in preparing to gain access to paid work once their sporting career is completed. Chapters Six and Seven will identify that many athletes do not properly prepare for a career outside of sport. Chapter Six will thus identify the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund's concept of 'Life after Rugby' as an example of SID at work in professional sport. The RPA's Benevolent Fund's SID-oriented 'Life after Rugby' programme is driven by the concept of providing a 'hand-up' rather than a hand-out. In other words, the Foundation desires to provide opportunities for players to earn their own money rather than relying on a provider for resources. SID, works well with the Social Investment State as defined by Giddens (1999), Midgley and Sherradan (1999) and Esping-Anderson (1992), who all argued for a transition to a Social Investment Model and urged that the state should move past the redistributive and consumption-based social welfare discussions of RED and MUD. These experts would like to move to a model where individuals are given the mechanisms to provide for themselves. The social investment model, or the SID, contends that investment in human capital has a positive effect on an

individual's ability to participate in society. Midgley and Sherradan (1999) argued that effective redistribution is best achieved through social investment:

Rather than using scarce resources to maintain needy people on income transfers, the social investment approach favours programmes that help them find employment or become self-employed. In many ways, they not only earn money but become self-respecting citizens who work, pay taxes and contribute to economic development (Midgley and Sherradan 1999:13).

Midgley and Sherradan (1999) accurately summarised the ethos of the RPA's Player Development Policy. The RPA's Benevolent Fund is an example of a charitable foundation that uses a social investment model to address the issue of social exclusion. Trustees of the RPA's Benevolent Fund emphasise developing employable skills and education while actively playing professional rugby through their 'Life After Rugby' programme. This programme is the consequence of a Social Integration Discourse (SID) – although it is noteworthy that the players use a variety of discourses in their responses to answers on the same topic (see Chapters Six and Seven). Chapter Seven will identify how that investment discourse is understood and adopted by professional rugby union athletes in order to examine whether the advantages as described above are understood in a real life application.

### 3.4 Why Is the Social Exclusion Discussion Important For Rugby Union?

If we look back at the definitions of social exclusion, specifically the definition provided by Roberts, who suggested social exclusion is the result of a “combination of wealth, income, employment, education, political representation and social and emotional support”, we will see how this discussion is important for rugby union. In particular, Chapters Six and Seven will demonstrate that once rugby union turned professional in 1995, the factors Roberts described above started becoming an issue for professional rugby union players. Athletes started to face issues of unfair employment practices through un-standardized employment contracts. Moreover, athletes had no formal representation to protect them from the new structure of rugby union ownership. The new

professional athlete also began to be warehoused from the community. This resulted in lower access to education and qualifications, which in turn reduced opportunities for post-professional-playing employment. Finally, there were no formal mechanisms for addressing the serious issue of welfare, both socially and emotionally until three years later, when the RPA was created in 1998. Chapter Six will explore the birth and evolution of the RPA. This growth eventually led to the creation of the Benevolent Fund, an organization created specifically to address the growing issue of welfare concerns and the risk of athletes becoming socially excluded as a result of their participation in professional of rugby union.

Two of the three aforementioned discourses, RED and SID, are beneficial to the theoretical understanding of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. RED addresses the Foundation's need to provide both forms of redistribution in the forms of redistribution of benefit services and direct grants. RED illustrates the Foundation's ability to redistribute wealth by providing direct financial payment to offset the medical and living expenses of a rugby-related injury or illness. Chapters Six and Seven will illustrate the dramatic increase of injury severity and forced retirement as a result of professionalism and depict how that rise increased the need to provide programmes that can deliver immediate financial assistance.

SID also assists in the theoretical understanding of the RPA and RPA's Benevolent Fund. Along with providing direct assistance, the Benevolent Fund participates in SID by promoting training and education programmes. Their push to socially invest in the playing community enables athletes to re-enter the community as active participants rather than as people who have been isolated by sport. The SID initiative provides opportunities for training, qualifications and formal education for players during their career in professional rugby. Chapter Seven will show that with the advent of professionalism, the player experienced a level of isolation which did not exist in pre-professional rugby. Prior to professionalism, the amateur player had a vocationally-oriented career that ran alongside his playing career. If he became injured on the pitch, the player would simply return to his



professional career, leaving rugby participation behind. With the advent of professionalism, the rugby playing career took over as the primary occupation and source of income. Having a primary occupation, players no longer needed to seek other employment skills. However, unlike some professional sports, the average professional rugby player will not leave rugby with financial security. Consequently, he will be required to secure employment and return to a second workforce. However, once the game was professionalised, rugby became a high-commitment occupation, requiring players to focus on training and performance to ensure continued employment. This decreased their ability and desire to pursue other opportunities. However, on account of the above-mentioned points, it is critical that a player develops some level of skill or education in order to allow him to re-enter the workforce as a full and active participant.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This thesis looks at how players at the highest level of rugby union football in England can face social exclusion as a direct result of their participation in the sport. This chapter aimed to establish an understanding of the theory/concept of social exclusion in order to highlight the difference between the traditional understandings of social exclusion as well to explain the unique contribution this research makes to the existing body of knowledge regarding social exclusion in general and social exclusion within sport in particular. This chapter highlighted how this thesis contradicts the two traditional veins of social exclusion literature, which either describe exclusion as the denial to participate in sport because of socio-economic reasons or maintain that sport is a tool of intervention that will help reduce social exclusion with high at-risk groups.

The chapter unpacked Levitas's three discourse models (RED, MUD and SID), which this thesis employs as a lens to explore the work of the RPA's Benevolent Fund and how the Benevolent Fund participates in the discourse of welfare. The chapter began with a definition of RED and an explanation about how the welfare state inherently falls into a redistributive position. This section explored the difference between horizontal and vertical redistribution while also identifying the

hybrid redistribution model of risk pooling. The section identified the key features of RED, highlighting the structural need for redistribution as a result of the structural production of exclusion. The section concluded with identifying the RED model in sports pension programmes.

The MUD discourse positions itself directly opposite to the SID model and places an emphasis on the behaviour of those who benefit from the welfare state. The section that explained this also outlined the MUD argument that providing programs of assistance only encourages and creates dependency on the welfare state. The MUD section identified the use of the ‘folk devil’ myth to discredit those who support redistributive welfare and underscored how MUD perpetuates the idea that exclusion is the result of low morality and poor personal choices. Advocates of MUD could argue that by pursuing a career in a professional sport, which requires a high level of self-oriented commitment, the individual is personally electing to follow a career path that is uncertain and unpredictable and which may lead to exclusion. Due to their high level of commitment, some players personally choose or are discouraged from developing other forms of employable skills. When the time of retirement occurs and the athlete is not equipped with an employable skill set, that athlete could become socially excluded because of his personal choices.

Finally the chapter examined the SID model of exclusion, which emphasises investing in the individual to maximise current and future employment potential. It gives prominence to this focus over debate about the advantages (RED) or disadvantages (MUD) of redistribution. SID does not separate social exclusion from paid employment and focuses all its attention on the tools which will help maximise employment possibilities. Rather than participating in the redistribution of resources and/or goods, SID seeks to invest in the individual by providing career qualifications, skill development and education which will assist in the process of acquiring paid employment. SID dominates the RPA’s Benevolent Fund’s ‘Life After Rugby’ programme, which provides a framework for skills development and education to assist in the acquisition of employment after a career in professional rugby.

Through her RED, MUD and SID models, Levitas provides theoretical frameworks by which comments and statements of the Benevolent Fund's Board of Directors and professional players can be analysed to help understand how the two parties understand, interpret and articulate the issue of social exclusion. They are useful frameworks for this thesis because they facilitate the thesis's chosen methodology of phenomenography for providing an honest description of the parties involved. Chapter Five will detail of how this theoretical framework works in concert with my selected methodology to accomplish what Entwistle (1997) and Martin (1997:130) argued to be desired outcomes of an interview: "to identify the 'categories of description' and understand the multiple meanings that a specific group of people may have for a specific phenomenon".

Levitas's frameworks allow the shared experiences of those involved in player welfare to be expressed. They also help to establish the function and purpose of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. To date, Levitas's discourse models have not been applied to the subject of social exclusion in the context of sport. This thesis hopes to fill that gap. The next chapter will highlight the existing body of literature that addresses the concept of social exclusion in relation to sport. It will show that understanding the form of exclusion experienced by the professional athlete through the use of Levitas's RED, MUD and SID is absent in the existing body of literature.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **Literature Review**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter Three introduced the concept of social exclusion and explained how I intend use Levitas's model of discourse to explore the relation between social exclusion as a theoretical concept and rugby union. In order to gain a better understanding of the application of the theory, this chapter will identify the three major themes that are central to this thesis: i) retirement from professional sport, ii) the risk of social exclusion that can result from the participation in professional sport and c) the intervention of not-for-profit organizations on behalf of those at risk of social exclusion. This thesis unites these three themes by examining the role of the RPA Benevolent Fund, a charitable organization designed to address player welfare in post-professional rugby union in England. The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the current body of literature on the aforementioned themes and to identify how this research expands the existing body of knowledge on social exclusion within sport.

First, the chapter begins by looking at the literature that has identified the difficulties related to transitioning from a professional sports career to a non-professional sports career and how active involvement in the transition process can help increase levels of satisfaction during and after the transition process. This literature review has helped to justify the need for organizations like the RPA. A review of the existing literature also highlights a dearth of research in the area of specific types of organizations and the benefits they can provide for the athlete who is either dealing with hardship or facing retirement from professional sport.

Second, this chapter will re-establish the concept of social exclusion as originally identified in Chapter Three, but will narrow its focus to social exclusion in elite sport. Literature on social exclusion in relation to the field of sport falls into two major categories: i) the prohibition of participation based on issues of gender, race, sexuality, geographical limitations and socio-economic status, and ii) sport as a tool to decrease social exclusion for at-risk populations. The chapter will describe both categories of literature in detail, distinguishing them from one another. It will also establish how this thesis begins to explore a new area of exclusion in connection to sport.

While the majority of sport exclusion literature gravitates towards categorising social exclusion in sport within these two categories, this thesis identifies the issue of social exclusion as a result of participation at the professional level of athletics. This thesis, therefore, attempts to broaden the understanding of social exclusion and explore how social exclusion can occur at the professional level of sport when formal mechanisms of care are not present to address the risk of exclusion.

Third, this chapter will describe the literature regarding not-for-profit intervention in addressing the lack of welfare mechanisms in professional sport. This will be done by examining both the organizational and economic theories that explain the creation of not-for-profit organizations. This will lead into a review of the literature that explores how charity/foundations have assisted - and can assist - in addressing welfare deficit and providing effective mechanisms for solving social exclusion.

#### 4.2 Retirement from Sport

A career in professional sport is filled with uncertainty and has an unpredictable duration (Roderick 2006a; McGillivray et al 2005). This uncertainty means elite and professional

athletes must address the issue of retirement at some point in their sporting career (Baillie and Danish 1992). Currently, the retirement literature for the elite level athlete focuses on two major areas: first, the cause of the retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie 1998,1994; Ogilvie & Talyor 1993) and second, the reaction the athletes undergo as they transition from a sporting career to a non-sporting career (Alfermann 2001; Bussmann & Alfermann 1991; Boothby, Tungatt & Townsend 1981). On the first issue, the work of Ogilvie and Taylor (1993) and Taylor and Ogilvie (1994; 1998) have identified four areas that are responsible for the retirement of a professional athlete: i) personal decision to retire, ii) the athlete is no longer selected to play, iii) the contract is not renewed or iv) the athlete is forced to retire due to injury. Webb et al. (1998) contended a similar position to Taylor and Ogilvie, but described only two scenarios: retirement by choice or retirement by force. Taylor, Ogilvie and Web et al. all identified that there is a difference between athletes self-determining to end their career and athletes being forced to retire due to external forces.

Of the potential scenarios mentioned above, only one sees the athlete in control of his or her retirement process: self-determined retirement on his or her own terms. The work of Webb et al. (1998), Anderson and Morris (2000), and Cecie-Erpic, Wylleman and Zupancic (2004) all stressed the importance of the athlete's "voluntariness" to the retirement process. They argued that retirement satisfaction is directly linked to athletes' willingness to leave their sporting career and their level of preparedness for the retirement transition. This means that athletes who have decided to retire are potentially more prepared to deal with the transition process from a sporting career to a non-sporting career than those who have been force to retire. Elder and Rudolph (1999: 17) added to the argument by stating that planning for retirement increases the level of satisfaction upon decision to retire: "The results indicate that thinking about retirement and attending planning meetings have a

significant positive impact on satisfaction even when income, wealth, marital status and health are included as explanatory variables". Brunson, Snow and Gustafson (1998) found similar results when they examined the mid-life career changes for non-career military personnel. Their research found that financial planning and preparation had a significant positive impact on the level of career transition satisfaction.

What is noteworthy is the consistent finding that preparation and planning positively impacts the retirement process. The risk of social exclusion is less likely for those athletes who prepare and participate voluntarily; this is because they have been active participants in their transition, and the proverbial "next step" has been calculated. The concern about exclusion is much greater for the athlete whose retirement from sport is not voluntary, planned or prepared (Ballie 1993; Ballie & Danish 1992; Werther & Orlick 1986; Ogilvie & Howe 1982; Lerch 1981; McPherson 1980).

Webb et al. (1998) found that the second scenario of retirement for the professional athlete – the athlete is no longer selected to play, places the athlete at a greater risk for social exclusion since the athlete has not been an active participant in his or her own retirement process. Unlike athletes in the first scenario, retirement in the second scenario can take the athlete by surprise and can find him or her in a state of unpreparedness. The work of Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004) examined exactly that: 'planned versus unplanned retirement' for athletes in Germany, Lithuania and Russia. They found that those who were active participants in their retirement preparation adjusted better to the "emotional and behavioural adjustment to career termination" (Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte; 2004:64) than those who were inactive in their retirement preparation. The concern is that few professional athletes actively engage in, or appropriately prepare for,

the process of transition from professional athlete to a non-sporting career (Ballie 1993; Ballie & Danish 1992; Werther & Orlick 1986; Ogilvie & Howe 1982; Lerch 1981; McPherson 1980).

One of the most significant changes that occurred in the literature of sports retirement was the transition from looking at retirement as a single event to viewing it a process that involves multiple factors. By drawing upon Mihovilovic's (1968) work, which examined the sudden termination of elite Yugoslavian football players and the negative experiences expressed by the players because of that act, Wylleman, Alfermann and Levallee (2004) and Coakley (1983) identified how athlete termination moved from a singular event to a process of transition. Coakley (1983) and Wylleman, Alfermann and Levallee (2004) promoted the idea that an act of termination was more than a single act and should be examined within the wider context of an athlete's life. Coakley (1983) argued that to understand the impact of termination, one must look at a concert of factors rather than just the act of ending a sporting career. Coakley (1983) further contended that the termination experience is affected by individual factors that are specific to each athlete. These factors include the age, gender and race of the athlete, the support systems (formal programmes, family, friends) the athlete has access to during the time of transition and the reasons for the termination. Coakley's arguments recall the aforementioned literature by Ogilvie and Taylor (1993), Taylor and Ogilvie (1998; 1994) and Webb et al. (1998).

Seligman's (1991) 'learned-optimism' theory – which examined a person's self-assessed determination to overcome situations – and Bandura's (1997) 'self-efficacy' theory - which considered a person's self-assessed competence to complete a task - complement the literature that has considered how athletes deal with the challenge of career transition.



Seligman (1991) and Bandura's (1997) work is important for considering whether athletes are able and willing to address their unplanned retirement if there are not programmes in place to assist them transition from one career to another. As Coakley (1983) and Wylleman, Alfermann and Levallee (2004) identified, the termination itself is not the cause for the dissatisfaction; instead, how the athlete is able to personally respond to the situation. His/her ability to access relevant resources are important factors in addressing the risk of exclusion as a result of termination. Without proper assistance, the career termination process can result in the exacerbation of other social concerns, including drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness (e.g. depression and suicide), identity issues which affect self-confidence and identity confusion. The process can also prompt eating issues and body dysmorphia (Blinde & Stratta 1992; Ogilvie 1987; Ogilvie & Howe 1982). Gould and Horn (1984) contended that the emotional and psychological impacts of termination are more difficult to process than loss of the financial rewards from sport.

#### 4.3 Existing Programmes that Address Career Transition in Sport

A minority of athletes properly prepare for athletic retirement (Baillie & Danish 1992; Werthner 1986; Ogilvie 1982; Lerch 1981; McPherson 1980). While there is a lack of programmes designed to address the retirement process for the elite athlete, there is an abundance of programmes designed to create elite level athletes. Hohmann and Seidel (2003) discussed the benefits of developing athletic talent at young ages while Cote (1994) looked at the impact that family support had on athletic development of young athletes. Similarly, Byrne (2011) examined the role and impact of development academies in the IRFU (Irish Rugby Football Union) and identified that, while there was a strategy for developing the individual into an elite athlete through the academy process, the athletes did not

experience the same type of 'development out' program for helping an athlete exit elite athletics.

Other literature has also studied the 'development out' of elite sports. In 2000, Stambulova examined the psychological accounts of Russian athletes during their development, performance and ending of their career in sports. Additionally, she identified the lack of a full-circle development program that included not only elite-athletic development but also an exit strategy to help the athlete to re-assimilate into a non-sporting career setting.

Stambulova, Yannick and Jäphag (2007) continued the discussion when they compared the retirement processes of French and Swedish athletes and discussed the coping factors related to retirement, the athlete's perception of retirement and the impacts planning for retirement has on the athlete. Earlier published research identified therapeutic tactics of emotional expression and stress management (Gordon 1995; Taylor 1994; Ogilvie 1993) along with other approaches, including psychotherapy (Chamalidis 1995) and mentoring programmes (Wylleman et al. 1993) to help with the transition process.

Much of the literature conducted on this topic is dedicated to sports psychology. This thesis will contribute to the existing body of literature by providing an examination of formal welfare mechanisms and how these mechanisms are discussed by those involved in professional rugby union in England. The failure of the RFU to provide such mechanisms is not only detrimental to the athlete, as the work in sports psychology has identified. The implications also extend to social service programmes, on which greater strains are placed because of the fractures in social cohesion that are the result of an increase in socially excluded individuals.

Despite the paucity of programmes, certain organizational career transition schemes have been developed and are in use for athletes. These programmes are typically managed by sports federations, national governing bodies of sport, academic institutions or independent groups who have a connection to a specific sport or type of athlete (Anderson & Morris 2000). The main focus of these organizations is to provide opportunities to establish life after sport by providing access to educational development, skill development, social development and other life skills. A majority of these programmes are designed to assist an elite amateur athlete while only a few are designed specifically to address the needs of the professional athlete ( Aflermann & Lavallee 2004; Anderson & Morris 2000; Wylleman ). Chapter Six will establish how a formal welfare programme was essential once the game of rugby union transitioned to a professional format. Chapter Six will also unpack the “quad-lemma”, the possible side-effects that professionalism could have on a rugby union athlete that may increase his risk of becoming socially excluded. The ‘quad-lemma’ identifies how social exclusion can be a consequence of participation in professional sport. Unlike traditional definitions of the term ‘social exclusion’ as it pertains to sport (identified in the next section), this thesis sees social exclusion as a possible bi-product of being a professional athlete.

#### 4.4 Social Exclusion in Sport

In this section I will identify the two main veins of literature that have discussed social exclusion in relation to sport. The literature is either focused on: i) exclusion from sports participation for socio-economic reasons or ii) sports as an intervening tool to address social exclusion within at-risk segments of the population. The main intent of this section is to establish the lack of research conducted on sport being the source of social exclusion.

Discussions of social exclusion in the context of sport started to emerge in the early 2000s with the growing interest in leisure policy. Roberts (2002) deepened this emerging scholarship by discussing how the concept of leisure was expanding into many facets of daily life. In doing so, Roberts established a basis for how social exclusion as a concept was creeping into leisure and leisure policy and underscored its importance as an area for sociological inquiry. Collins and Kay (2003) added to the discussion by examining how education, gender, age, disability and geographic location can negatively impact participation in sport. Other literature has also identified social and economic factors that can potentially result in exclusion from sport, taking into consideration gender and sexuality (Wellard 2009; Messner 2007; Caudwell 2006; Lucas 2000; Messner & Sabo 1990), ethnicity (Burdsey 2010, 2007; Smith 2007; Miller & Wiggling 2004; Carrington & McDonald 2001; ), physically disability (Thomas and Smith 2009; Howe 2008; Hargreaves 2000) and social class (Nicholson and Hoyer 2008; Green, Smith & Roberts 2005; Collins & Buller 2003). While all of this research is important, it does highlight a gap that this thesis attempts to address since the literature's focus on socio-economic factors that cause social exclusion leaves out a consideration of how sport can result in social exclusion at the end of a professional athlete's career.

A second trend that has emerged in the sport and social exclusion debate is how sport participation can be used by grassroots organizations to increase inclusion for population groups - specifically youth populations - who are at risk of exclusion. Sport has been recognized as a constructive action that can help teach leadership, communication, discipline, self-respect and social networking (Best 1999; Collins & Kay 1999; Keller et al. 1998; Svoboda 1994). Svoboda (1994:15) emphasised the "strong evidence" that sport can positively impact both the personal development and mental well-being of those who

participate, including “...self-concept, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, tension and stress, self- confidence, energy, mood, efficiency and well-being”. Wankel and Sefton (1994) also identified the pro-social factors that sport can provide for participants, including reduction of depression and anxiety, developing better intergroup relationship skills and becoming more involved in their community. Wankel and Sefton (1994) also identified how participation in sport can address challenges related to social status and social mobility. The positive contribution of sport, as identified above, has allowed sport to be seen as a tool of intervention in addressing social and community ills.

Despite the common use of sport as a tool of intervention for social policy, academic research has questioned the ability of sport-based interventions to be effective in addressing social exclusion. However, the majority of research did confirm its utility despite the prevailing scepticism among academics. Coalter (2007), Collins and Kay (2003), Nicholls (2004), and Bailey (2007) all examined the role of sport-based interventions in addressing crime and argued that sport can have the ability to create citizenship and increase social capital.

Again, while this body of literature is important in the discussion of social exclusion and sport, it is not germane to this thesis. The professional rugby union player, who is central to this research, is not the ‘at-risk’ demographic that sport-based inclusion policy is designed to address. Indeed, the research demographic in this research is almost the reverse; unlike the traditional at-risk community, the professional athlete has actively and consciously selected the possibility of limiting his or her inclusion by pursuing a career in professional sport. The concept of ‘positive deviance’ as used by Hughes and Coakley (1991) provides an explanation for why an athlete is willing to accept negative consequences - typically physical injury - in the pursuit of athletic excellence. Hughes and Coakley (1991) provides an example

of 'positive deviance' as when an athlete continues to train even if it causes or exaggerates pain and injury, disturbs family life, and endangers health and safety. However, even while professional athletes are not conventional at-risk individuals, those players who sacrifice education and career development opportunities for their sport can become excluded. As such, they broaden the 'socially excluded' demographic, thus deepening the exclusion pool. Thus, the social exclusion of professional athletes, even though they hold privileged social and cultural (and often economic) positions in local communities, is strongly worth studying.

#### 4.5 Problems with Existing Research on 'Exclusion' in Sport

As seen from the discussion above, the literature on sport and social exclusion is centred on exclusion from sport in two ways: i) as the result of one or a combination of socio-economic factors: gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability and ii) as a tool of intervention in addressing exclusion for at-risk populations. The literature on professional level sport as a contributing cause of exclusion is much more limited. One of the few pieces of literature which has identified elite level sports participation as the source of exclusion is Schaffer (2000) who looked at how worker compensation rights are denied to professional athletes in the United States of America because of their status as professional athletes:

In a number of jurisdictions in the United States, professional athletes do not receive adequate protection under state workers' compensation laws – a protection granted to most employees for occupational injuries. Professional athletes often cannot acquire workers' compensation benefits after sports related injury because legislatures and courts have created laws that bar coverage for athletes. Further some team owners limit workers' compensation benefits to professional athletes by contractual restrictions. While highly paid professional athletes may be unaffected

when limited or excluded for workers' compensation benefits, non-elite or low paid professional athletes are greatly affected by such limitations and exclusions.

(Schaffer, 2000:624)

The very laws designed to ensure assistance in times of injury, illness or hardships are denied to certain individuals because of a particular chosen career path. This in effect systematically prohibits equal protection under the law, thus increasing the risk of exclusion. For example, the state of Florida excludes professional athletes from state workers' compensation laws: "employment does not include services performed by or as: Professional athletes, such as professional boxers, wrestlers, baseball, football, basketball, hockey, polo, tennis, jai alai and similar players" (FL State Ann 440.02 (1) (C) (3) Schaffer). This law was challenged in 1983 (Rudolph v. Miami Dolphins) on the grounds that it was a violation of the fourteenth amendment's equal protection clause<sup>21</sup>. The court upheld the law, stating:

Professional football players incur serious injuries on a regular, frequent and repetitive basis. They are generally well paid, and as NFL contracts in these cases exemplify, they willingly hold themselves out as well-skilled in the sport of their choice. They make a conscious decision to use their skills in an occupation involving a high risk of frequent, repetitive and serious injury. We cannot say that the legislative exclusion of the voluntary, though highly dangerous, activity from the workers' compensation act fails to bear some reasonable relationship to the legislative state

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<sup>21</sup> The Equal Protection Clause requires each state to provide equal protection under the law to all people within its jurisdiction. This clause was the basis for Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the Supreme Court decision which precipitated the dismantling of racial segregation in United States education. In Reed v. Reed (1971), the Supreme Court ruled that laws arbitrarily requiring sex discrimination violated the Equal Protection Clause.

proposal and is so completely arbitrary and lacking in equality of application to all persons similarly situated as to violate the cited constitutional provisions. (Schaffer; 2000:640)

The case of Rudolph versus the Miami Dolphins reaffirmed the legal precedent, thus continuing the systematic denial of welfare rights for the athlete. Shaffer (2000: 636) argued that laws such as Florida's statute 440.02 (1) (c) place the athlete in a vulnerable state: "As a result non-elite professional athletes who earn low salaries are left with no ability to recover from workplace injuries". The professional athlete needs protection from the risk of injury. More specifically, the non-elite and low paid professional athlete requires a mechanism which protects their personal welfare. Schaffer (2000: 653-654) further detailed why the non-elite, low paid professional athlete needs protection:

Non-elite professional athletes generally do not receive guaranteed contracts that secure a period of employment. Thus when non-elite professional athletes are injured to such a degree that they are no longer capable of playing for their respective teams, the injured athlete will only receive their salary for the remainder of the season. As a result when a state excludes professional athletes from its workers' compensation programme, it inherently hurts non-elite athletes and female professional athletes because they have no guaranteed contracts and therefore no remedy to seek long term benefits.

Shaffer's remarks are directly relevant to the professional rugby union player. Their contracts are short-term and, if a long-term injury occurs, that contract can be terminated. It is also the case with professional rugby union that a majority of players do not receive high levels of income when compared with other professional athletes (e.g. footballers). The



lower wage does not allow for a complete retirement from employment to occur after they leave the sport (Byrne 2011). The failure to provide proper protection creates an environment for a third party to establish themselves as a service provider to the community of elite and low paid professional athletes. The RPA, as it is known today, established themselves as that third party representative and created a trade union designed to look after the welfare interests of the professional rugby union athlete in England. The next section will detail the work of trade unions and explore how they create a community that fosters mutual assistance.

#### 4.6 Trade Unionism

The trade unions can be traced back to the ‘friendly societies’ of the eighteenth century. These were typically groups of people who were associated through trade and who gathered resources to help pay for medical care and death expenses (Gorsky 1990; Simon 1995). Webb and Webb (1920) provided a historic, yet relevant definition of a modern day trade union: “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of employment” (Webb & Webb, 1920:1). Webb and Webb’s definition concisely yet accurately articulates the current legal use of the term. The current United Kingdom law defines a trade union as follows:

An organization (whether temporary or permanent)—

(a) Which consists wholly or mainly of workers of one or more descriptions and whose principal purposes include the regulation of relations between workers of that description or those descriptions and employers or employers’ associations; or.

(b) Which consists wholly or mainly of—.

(i) Constituent or affiliated organizations which fulfil the conditions in paragraph (a) (or themselves consist wholly or mainly of constituent or affiliated organizations which fulfil those conditions), or.

(ii) Representatives of such constituent or affiliated organizations.

and whose principal purposes include the regulation of relations between workers and employers or between workers and employers' associations, or the regulation of relations between its constituent or affiliated organizations.(Parliament 1992)

The current United Kingdom and European Union's legal definitions are summed up by the 72-year-old characterisation of the trade union, which is at the centre of this research.

Trade unions are important social organizations, for they provide political and social representation for the labour force. Chapter Three identified representation as an important component in identifying potential environments which may harbour social exclusion. Trade unions provide political representation and attempt to prevent their workers from becoming fully or partially excluded from society. A trade union provides the worker with a voice to his/her employer as well as a voice of the industry in which he/she works. For example, teachers of one school may rally to request for a specific change that affects their school. Teachers can also assemble as one labour force segment to protest or

lobby against legislative changes that they feel will negatively impact their profession or the quality of education.

The trade union enables employees to use their collective voice as a group to maintain or improve their conditions of employment. However, not all professions are extended such rights. Carlin and Fairman (1995) and Schaffer (2000), referenced in the previous section, identified that in the United States, depending on state of residence, a professional athlete can be legally denied workers' compensation. Schaffer (2000:624) identified this as a concern for the elite athlete who does not earn a comparatively high salary: "While highly paid professional athletes may be unaffected when limited or excluded from workers' compensation benefits, non-elite or low paid professional athletes are greatly affected by such limitations and exclusions".

The role of athlete-focused trade unions have grown as sports have developed into commercial entities and athletes have begun to require new levels of protection from employers (Rosen & Sanderson 2001). However, not all athletes are extended such protection.

In sports such as boxing, mixed martial arts (MMA), stock car racing (NASCAR) and bull riding, the athlete is an independently contracted and is not a part of a collective sports body. This lack of a collective body creates a level of difficulty in establishing a players' association (Lane 1995). Boxing, MMA and bull riding have a similar operational framework in regards to providing welfare mechanism to athletes. The athlete is provided programmes of care during the event, but once the event is completed the athlete must rely on his or her own devices. Marrocco (2010) pointed to the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) to illustrate this fact: "While bigger fight promotions such as the UFC carry comprehensive insurance to medically cover its competitors during events, long-term issues on

compensation and healthcare typically fall on the fighter and his/her management”

(Marrocco 2010;1). Professional sports that are centred on a team structure have had more success in organising formal player representation.

In the United States, football (NFL), basketball (NBA), baseball (MLB) and ice hockey (NHL) all have pension packages designed to care for the athlete post-professional career (Chaplin 2012). Sporting bodies in the United Kingdom also came together to protect the players. In 1967, for example, the Professional Cricket Association (PCA) was established with the mission:

To promote and protect the interests of the members by endeavouring to come to amicable agreements with all lawfully constituted cricket authorities, primarily the England and Wales Cricket Board, with a view to the abolition of all restrictions which affect the social and financial position of members at all times. (Professional Cricket Association 2012)

The PCA participated in standardising player contracts and establishing a minimum wage for the professional player. They were also involved in establishing an agreements between Kerry Packer’s World Series of Cricket and the Test and County Cricket Board. In 1995, the PCA created a pension programme to address the post-professional needs of the professional player.

The world’s oldest professional sport union is the Professional Footballers’ Association (PFA), which was established December 2 1907 (Harding 1991). Walters (2004) conducted a case study of how the PFA thrived as an organization during the 1980’s and 1990’s while other trade union organizations were losing membership, influence and power. Walters contended that the strength of the union was due to its ability to enhance its membership

interests within the football industry. Another factor was the loyalty between its leadership and its members, as expressed by Banks (2002:159): “One of the strongest unions in Britain with a membership that is incredibly loyal to its leadership. The union has become a fourth force in the governance of the English game”.

The goal of the PFA is not unlike those of the PCA and RPA: “the aim of the PFA is to protect, improve and negotiate the conditions, rights and status of all professional players by collective bargaining agreements” (Professional Football Association 2012). As the trade union of the professional footballer, the goal is to protect the player through their entire career. The PFA also assists in acquiring vocational paths for players once they have retired. Pat Lally, Director of Education for the PFA, stated:

Players need to ensure they have every base covered and it does take the pressure off when you’re playing on a Saturday to know you’ve got qualifications under your belt. You know you’ve got the qualification to hopefully get a decent job and a decent career once your playing days are over. (Lally, 2012)

Critics have question how successful Lally’s programme has been. Drawer and Fuller (2002) investigated how professional footballers perceived the level of support they received before and after their retirement from the professional game. The researchers found that while the PFA had a significant influence on the player during and before the retirement transition, there was a substantial level of dissatisfaction regarding the education/welfare provisions. Drawer and Fuller found that 81% of those who participated in the study were not satisfied with the education/welfare services they were provided during their time as a professional football player:

The inadequacies identified in the provision of injury prevention support services at UK professional soccer clubs have been supported by the views expressed by retired professional soccer players in this survey. This has important implications for the UK professional soccer industry because health and safety legislation requires to identify hazards and risks arising from their work activities and to provide appropriate information and training about the risks. At present, players are inadequately informed about the health risk arising from a career in professional soccer and the control measures to reduce these risks. ... Without a strategy for providing adequate long term assistance for players forced to retire through injury, the soccer industry remains open to the possibility of litigation from players seeking financial redress for loss of income. (Drawer & Fuller, 2002: 37)

Though the results may not be the desired outcome for the athlete, the PFA does have an understanding of mutual aid and player assistance during the time of career transition. In short, Drawer and Fuller (2002) argued that programmes that help the professional athlete during times of hardship and career transition are valuable; however, they also contended that the current operation of the PFA's programme is failing to fully satisfy its membership.

Another player union which provides similar assistance programmes is the RPA, which is the focus of this thesis. Currently, no academic research has been conducted on the RPA's Benevolent Fund. Established in 1998, and originally called the Professional Rugby Players' Association, the RPA define themselves as "the representative body and collective voice of professional rugby union players in England". The objectives and aims of the RPA are to first safeguard the rights of players past, present and future. Second, to establish and maintain better conditions of employment; third to provide members with representation at the

highest level of the game. The fourth and fifth objectives of the RPA are central to this research, and are to provide financial or other assistance to members in respect of matters arising due to serious injury, illness or hardship and to assist with career and educational training for their members. Finally, the RPA has the aim to promote the sport of rugby union in England. The goals of the RPA will be examined further in Chapters Six; however, it is worth noting here the core feature of the trade union: the collective action of individuals who come together for the purpose of collective benefit. This underlying philosophy of the trade union complements the underlying principles of communitarianism, identified immediately below. Understanding these will permit better appreciation for the rationale of the RPA Benevolent Fund's use of mutual aid.

Classic communitarianism promotes responsibility of the individual (agent) to the community (structure). Communitarians argue that individuals are part of a community, and the best way to maximise communal benefit is through the mutual support of one another. Despite its focus on collectivism, Bellah (1996: 8) illustrated how community and individualism are not mutually exclusive:

Individuals are realized only in and through communities, and that strong, healthy, morally vigorous communities are the prerequisite for strong, healthy, morally vigorous individuals.

The role of community has been long been stressed as an important social structure, from the time of Durkheim to the present era, which has produced current social commentators like Robert Putnam (2000). Durkheim and Putnam have both addressed the potential social ills of a diminishing community structure (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1984). However, 'community' is a staple concept in the social sciences and foundational to social research.

The term 'community' has been defined by Abercrombie et al. (1984: 44) as, "one of the most elusive and vague in sociology and is by now largely without specific meaning". The inconsistent application of the term has resulted in its receiving a wide variety of definitions. This lack of consistency has led some scholars to disregard the term altogether and even promote the idea that the concept should not be used in social research at all (Day and Murdock 2011). Day and Murdock (2011: 1) defined community as, "those things, which people have in common which binds them together, and gives them the sense of belonging with one another". This is a very general and highly inclusive definition. Vagueness like this concerned Nisbet (1953) decades earlier, who warned that general definitions should be used with great caution. For Nisbet (1953), the concern was that the term could become all-encompassing, thus losing any power in classification.

However, in classical social theory the idea of community is a very general term. Community was used as a way of talking about 'group-ness', which is simply a distinction from being an individual, the state of being recognised as a group (Nisbet 1953). Cohen (1985) also warned about overgeneralising collective groups. If the perception of a collective group is based on superficial observations, there is a great chance that the truly important and special nuances of the collective group will be missed. The focus should be on what Cohen (1985) referred to as the "Human Social Experience". This is an active approach of respecting the particulars of a collective group rather than making bland generalisations, which lead to empty understandings.

Understanding how communities are created and persist is also important to examining the creation of the RPA. The German scholar Tonnies (1955) contended that the true community existed in the rural/country life, or *Gemeinschaft*. Those that moved to the city



replaced the close bonds of community for loose social associations, or *Gesellschaft* (Tonnie 1995 [1887]). While Tonnie defined community by physical location the notion of community has expanded from being a geographical construction to a construction of culture and organizations. Troman, Erlich and Rothman (2006) presented three options through which communities can organise: i) geographic communities, which are defined by a particular location, ii) communities of culture, which are defined by ethnic or religious beliefs and iii) community organizations, which are defined by a broad range of social structures including family networks, professional associations, political parties and economic development organizations. The third type of community structure - or the community organization structure - best describes the community of the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Fund. The RPA is professional association as well as economic development for the larger rugby community.

In terms of community and sport, much of the literature focuses on the use of sport in creating community via social capital<sup>22</sup> (Coalter 2008; Jarvie 2003). Hanifan (1916) referred to social capital as a personal investment in a community or a tool to increase social cohesion and solidarity. Institutions of sport and many sports figures use sport to create social capital, usually in the form of charitable acts. The next section will identify what is referred to as 'socially responsible marketing', a method devoted to creating a feeling of community.

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<sup>22</sup> For more about social capital see: Coleman, J. S. (1988). "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology*(94). Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community* New York, Simon & Schuster, Putnam, R. D. a. F., Lewis (2003). *BETTER TOGETHER: Restoring the American Community*. New York, Simon & Schuster. Marquand, D. (2002). *The Fall of Civic Culture*. *New Statesman*: 34-38.

#### 4.7 Community Through Charity in Sport

Sheth and Babiak (2010) identified that many executives in the business of sports entertainment view social responsibility marketing as a strategic and critical tool. Their research also showed that sports executives focus their corporate social responsibility on developing local communities and partnerships with national or local charities. Much of their work highlighted the charitable activity of particular team franchises or pet projects of individual players. For example, the PFA places great emphasis on community and charitable participation: “The PFA is committed to raising the profile and awareness of the extensive work and participation of players in support of Community and Charitable activities. The PFA Community involvement extends across many areas as: Health, Education, Social Inclusion and Equalities, underlining our commitment to make a positive difference in society.

Most of the literature on charity work in sport is concentrated on sport teams’ efforts to build community and/or a professional sport team’s attempt to enhance their standing in their community through building a bank account of political and social capital (Coalter 2010; Jarvie 2007; Houlihan 2005; Jarvie 2003). However, the core work of the RPA’s Benevolent Fund is not about creating their own capital is rather aimed at assisting in the building of capital for union members. The existing literature has not addressed non-profit organizations’ efforts to assist in welfare development for professional athletes. The lack of research is not because of a paucity of organizations to examine. In the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of charitable organizations that are designed to benefit injured athletes. These organizations have the mandate to provide assistance in offsetting medical and living expenses during injury or hardship. These groups are financially

and otherwise supported by a mixture of stand-alone organizations who are affiliated with governing bodies of sport.

#### 4.8 Charity in Rugby

To examine the phenomenon of welfare relief for professional athletes through charity, this research will focus specifically on the sport of rugby union and the RPA Benevolent Fund.

Charity in rugby union has served many purposes, including providing tools to build community<sup>23</sup> both internally for the member of the club and externally in supporting public action. However, charity has also saved the game from financial disaster:

During the financial crisis that hit rugby and every other sport in the early 1930s, Leicester and other sides established supporters' clubs to raise money. As with similar organizations in soccer and rugby league, these acted as adjuncts to official fund-raising activities, often with no small success – Leicester's supporters raised £2,225 within a year of the club being established in 1934. (Collins 2009 p 114)

Studies by Collins (2009) and Dunning and Sheard (1979) both provided the social context for rugby union, establishing the social economic field in which rugby union occurs as well as identifying the issue of class in the sport of rugby union. Collins (2009) provided a social timeline dating back to the fictional *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and ending with the professionalism of the game. However, this research did not address the increase of injuries the sport encountered as it transitioned from promoting 'Muscular Christianity' to being a professional sport. Additionally, the work did not address the lack of organised support systems for addressing issues of injury as a result of the increase in numbers of injuries.

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<sup>23</sup> For examples see <http://www.rugbyinthecommunity.com/>. [Accessed 8, May, 2011.]

The existing literature has provided considerable information about injury itself (Fuller, Brooks and Cancea 2007; Berry et al. 2006; Silver and Gill 1999; Armour et al. 1997; Wetzler et al. 1996), with growing emphasis on traumatic brain injuries (McCrory et al. 2008; Gladwell 2001; Marshall & Spencer 2001). The volumes of injury-related research establish the seriousness of injury in rugby union; however, the research fails to complete the circle and address the corresponding welfare of rugby union players.

Most of the research conducted on the sport of rugby union has been on what occurs on the field. This thesis will add to the presently-limited literature on what occurs 'back of house' – when the fans have left the stadium and it is time to address the damages from play. In doing so, this research will contribute to the literature in three main ways: i) it will add to the growing literature that sees not-for-profit organizations as legitimate alternatives bodies for providing welfare; ii) it will provide a social understanding of the operation of a currently unexamined not-for-profit which benefit professional athletes; iii) it will offer a deeper social understanding of charity within the arena of sport.

Charity is recognized as an important sector of British society. Anheier and Leat (2002:29) went as far as to say, "Charities more generally, and foundations specifically, are vitally important institutions for advanced countries like Britain". Anheier and Leat (2002:28) additionally added that despite the vital nature of charitable institutions, little is known about them: "Research on British foundations is simply insufficient to provide a solid, systematic picture of what foundations in the country do, how they operate, for what purpose and to what effect". Recently, government officials in the UK have turned their attention to better understanding how charitable organizations impact British society. This new interest manifested itself on 1 October 2008 with the establishment of The Centre for

Charitable Giving and Philanthropy, whose primary function continues to be to develop a greater understanding of the philanthropic environment in the United Kingdom; their website states: “CGAP is the UK’s first research Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy. It aims to develop knowledge and engage with donors, charities and practitioners” (Philanthropy 2008). The recent move to develop a better understanding of charity answers the call of organizational sociologists who have identified the lack of organizational work conducted on philanthropy (Anheier 2009 ; Cluff 2009; Vesterlund 2006; Fehr & Schmidt 2006; Anheier & Leat 2002; Cook 1997; Kelly 1977). Bekkers and Wiepking (2007:22) have also declared a lack in theoretical literature on the topic of philanthropy: “as far as we know, there are no theoretical models describing the mechanism of solicitation, psychological rewards, values and efficacy”. Admittedly, addressing that challenge is no easy task, Brown (1997: 183) argued that theory is difficult to establish in the field of philanthropy: “No single model captures all the motivations that underlie charitable actions”. Regardless, all of the authors above have identified a gap in both the theoretical and organizational knowledge on philanthropy in the United Kingdom, and they are not alone. Anheier and Leat (2002:3) have also called for more work to be done:

We need to know at least as much about the British philanthropy as is known about US foundations and, more importantly, to open up a public dialogue about how it can best develop in the future.

This thesis responds to Anheier and Leat’s appeal, as it is one of the few examinations of non-profit intervention in the social exclusion of the professional athlete. Anthony Giddens (1999:9) contended, “State benefits are vital for rescuing families in need, and the state should step in wherever individuals, for one reason or another, are unable to fend for

themselves". The role of the welfare state is to provide two main services: i) to do for the individual what the individual cannot do for himself/herself and ii) to provide a safety net during times of hardships. Giddens contended the state has an obligation to protect its people from economic hardships. The financial difficulties of the individual frequently occur at the same time as they do for the state, which aggravates the difficulties for both. Therefore, when the state faces economic hardship, their ability to provide services to the individual(s) becomes strained, which places programmes of care into question (Taylor-Gooby 2002;2001). Chapter Three identified in detail the many risks facing a welfare state's ability to provide programmes and services including how social services come under attack during economic downturns; the chapter also demonstrated how non-profit organizations provide welfare-oriented services that the market and government have failed to dispense (Steinberg 2006). The next section will identify in more detail how non-profit organizations can emerge in such an environment.

#### 4.9 Creation of Non-Profit<sup>24</sup> Organizations:

Weisbrod (1975) pioneered scrutinising the role of the non-profit organization in a mixed economy. Weisbrod identified that the non-profit could provide a "safety net" when government action and the private market failed to deliver adequate services. Years later, Steinberg (2006:119) summarised what would become known as 'Weisbrod's three failures': if "markets fail to provide adequate quantities of collective goods, governments provide these goods in accordance with the wishes of the electorate, and those who wanted higher

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<sup>24</sup> I follow Steinberg's (2006:118) definition of non-profit as: "one precluded from distributing, in financial form, its surplus resources to those in control of the organization. By this definition, non-profit organizations can earn and retain financial surplus ("profit") provided they do not pay dividend checks or their equivalent to the board of directors or top managers".

levels of services than government provides support non-profit organizations". Weisbrod (1975) argued that when people are dissatisfied with government or free market services, they look to the not-for profit sector to address the lack of quality and/or quantity of services. The non-profit sector places a greater emphasis on quality and quantity which is a different set of motives for service than the motives of government or the free market. Ben-Ner and Gui's (2003) work on the creation of non-profit organizations established the concept of stakeholders. The "supply-side stake holders" - or owners of production - place greater emphasis on management decisions about maximising financial returns and operational control, while the "demand-side stakeholder" - employees or consumers - place emphasis on the quality of service. To maximise financial returns, the "supply-side stakeholder" needs to take advantage of those whom they employ. Ben-Ner and Gui articulated that point as follows: "For-profit firms have the incentive to take advantage of demand-side stakeholders". This creates an atmosphere of mistrust (Ben-Ner and Gui, 2003:752). This environment of mistrust creates the need for an organization that represents the interests the "demand-side stakeholder". In short, the "demand-side stakeholder" places priority on the quality and fairness of output rather than on the cost of the output. For the purpose of this thesis, the "demand-side stakeholders" appear in the form of the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Foundation. The "demand-side stakeholders" are intended to be less burdened by financial gains and more troubled by the quality of care and representation of its membership.

The role of a charity as a provider of welfare is not new in the United Kingdom. Charity has long been a part of the country's social structure and has provided welfare services to the public since the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 (Charlesworth 2010). Before the rise of the welfare state in the 1940's, many citizens relied on the acts of mutual aid organization – or

the abovementioned “Friendly Societies”. Friendly Societies were not officially recognised until the Rose’s Act of 1793. As stated earlier, these social structures gathered resources for burial expenses and old age homes fees, and paid for medical care. Members of these groups were usually associated with a particular trade and gave birth to the modern day trade and labour unions, which were not officially recognised until the Royal Commission of 1871-74.

With the rise of industrialisation in the United Kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the country faced new problems related to massive population growth and poverty. The Industrial Revolution not only created more working poor but also produced unseen wealth for many individuals. Those who amassed great amounts of wealth established private foundations to help the working poor and destitute (Bremner 1996). These associations would become the blueprint for the modern day not-for-profit organization. Since the philanthropic actions of these organizations were completely privately funded and had a positive impact on the social ills that the government was failing to address, the government had no reason to intervene or investigate (Harris 2010, 2007).

The United Kingdom experienced a change in their political and economic approach to the welfare state in the 1940’s(Taylor-Gooby 2002). Prior to World War II, the United Kingdom had a liberal approach to public welfare spending, meaning there was a relatively low level of government-funded programmes and a relatively large non-profit community for addressing social needs. After World War II, the country shifted to a social democratic welfare model. This shift meant large state-sponsored programmes and a decrease in participation of the private non-profit sector. The Beveridge Report, named after Sir William Beveridge, outlined a comprehensive approach to addressing the five “Giant Evils” in



society: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. The report helped usher in a battery of reforms, which led to the rise of what is now known as the welfare state. The original report instigated the creation of National Insurance as well the National Health Service (Abel-Smith 1992).

Despite some clear policies the report put in place, the definitional boundaries of the welfare state were not clear, and the opaqueness around the term persists (Barr 2004; Ropke 1962). The term is cloaked in political and economic ethos. Depending on one's personal, political and economic perspective, the welfare state could acquire myriad meanings. Gangl (2007) contended the modern welfare state was born in Europe in the mid-nineteenth-century and was designed to provide social solidarity, protection and economic equality. Gangl noted that the welfare state provides basic and fundamental programmes, including housing, health care, education and unemployment protection. Barr (2004) stated that the definitional boundaries of the welfare state are not well-defined, adding that "(Welfare State) is short hand for the state's activities in broad areas: cash benefits; health care; education; and food, housing, and other welfare services" (Barr 2004: 21). T.H Marshall (1950) viewed the welfare state as the pinnacle of advanced society. He provided a more philosophical understanding of the term and maintained that the welfare state is the evolution of citizenship rights; welfare is not rewarded based on need or class, but is rather a right extended to those who are active participants in society. For Marshall, the welfare state sees democracy, welfare and capitalism all working together to provide for all.

The post-war reform eliminated the need for "Friendly Societies" (Robbins 2006) though charitable activity did not become obsolete. The remit of the new welfare state included providing services such as health care, unemployment and disability benefits. The key focus

of the new post-war model was on strong governmental control over the economy to ensure employment, and a related focus was the provision of social programmes to prevent the return of the social ills of pre-war England (Perkins 2004; Taylor-Gooby 2002). Even though the government accepted the role of the universal provider of employment, the role of the trade union was still necessary for regulating the fairness and treatment of those employed.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

Three major themes of literature that are central to this thesis are: athletes' retirement from professional sport, the risk of social exclusion which can result from the participation of professional sport and the role of not-for-profit organizations in addressing the impacts of social exclusion. The aims of this chapter were to provide an understanding of the current literature that exists on the three themes as well as to identify how this research expands the existing body of knowledge on the topic of social exclusion in professional sport. A further aim was to launch new academic discussion about not-for-profit intervention in welfare concerns of professional athletes.

This chapter established that the transition from a sporting career to a non-sporting career can be difficult. While there are many programmes in place to help individuals develop a professional sporting career, there are very few programmes that help the athlete transition out of a professional sporting career. The research that has been conducted on such programmes has focused on the psychological need of athletes rather than on their social need. The chapter established that athletes who are active participants in their retirement process are much more satisfied with the retirement process, yet very few athletes actively participate or prepare for their retirement (planned or unplanned). This indicates that

athletes must not wait until the perceived end of their career to start preparing for retirement, as one cannot predict when retirement may occur. The span of a sporting career is too unpredictable, and the risk of social exclusion for an athlete struggling with the retirement process is too great.

This chapter also established how the concept of social exclusion is typically related to sport research. The aim in outlining this body of literature was to illustrate the distinctiveness of my research and to highlight the lack of research conducted on both the risk of social exclusion of the professional athletes and the lack of research conducted on the intervention programmes designed to counter possible exclusion.

Additionally, this chapter looked at the role of non-profit intervention. In particular, it examined the trade union as a social structure to protect the athlete from the dangers of employment-induced exclusion. Relatedly, the chapter identified the communitarian values surrounding the trade unions and how the values of mutual aid allow non-profit intervention on behalf of the socially excluded. This all culminates with the creation of the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Fund; the RPA is a trade union that subscribes to a communitarian ideology that ensures solidarity not only for the community of rugby union but for the larger community in which rugby union resides. Chapters Six and Seven will illustrate in greater detail just how the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Fund was created as well how they participated in the current discourse of social exclusion with their concept of 'Life After Rugby'.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Methodology**

#### 5.1 Introduction

This research is exploratory in nature and provides an examination of the phenomenon of player welfare and retirement preparation. This chapter will identify how I proceeded with my empirical research of RPA's Benevolent Fund and professional rugby union players to identify how player welfare is discussed by both parties. The work of Alfermann, Stambulova and Zemaityte (2004) and Wylleman, Alfermann and Levallee (2004) identified the need to provide systems of care for elite athletes, but they did not address the structure in which that care could or should be delivered. Therefore, this chapter will begin by briefly re-identifying the research problem as well as the research questions. The chapter will then explain the design of this research project as well as provide a narrative of the data collection process, analysis and written presentation. Included in the narrative is a statement of epistemology, which will highlight my selected methodology of phenomenography. Additionally, it will defend my selection of Levitas's discourse models on social exclusion for the conceptual lenses through which I analyse the RPA's Benevolent Fund's work.

The chapter will also address the difficulties I faced while conducting the academic enquiries, including concerns surrounding the data collection and data analysis process. The chapter will address several methodological issues including my personal relation with the research topic and my non-native status. The chapter will conclude by recognising the challenges and weaknesses of the methodology selected for this research.

## 5.2 Research Problem

This thesis has acknowledged that charitable foundations play an important role both socially and operationally in Britain (General 2001); however, Anheier and Leat (2002) contended that there is not enough research being done on the institution of charitable foundations. Anheier and Leat (2002:3) were clear in their desired outcomes for more research in this area by arguing that, “we need to know at least as much about the British philanthropy as is known about US foundations and, more importantly, to open up a public dialogue about how it can best develop in the future”. In response to this exhortation, this thesis will begin a discussion on the charitable organizations within sport that are designed to insulate athletes from the dangers of a career in professional sport. Following from this, it will indicate how additional levels of welfare support can be provided. Both goals will be accomplished by addressing the following questions:

- 1) What is the social history of the Rugby Players Association’s Benevolent Fund?
- 2) How does the Rugby Player Association’s Benevolent Fund operate?
- 3) What are the potential contributions of the Rugby Players Association’s Benevolent Fund to the larger social debate on charitable participation in addressing issues of welfare deficit?

To address the following questions adequately, this chapter will outline how the research was designed, conducted and processed in order to provide an accurate and useful account of the RPA’s Benevolent Fund’s mission, history and how its provision of mechanisms of welfare has impacted professional rugby union.

### 5.3 Epistemology

The research employs a pragmatic epistemology which seeks to establish a useful understanding of how the RPA's Benevolent Fund operates. The pragmatic epistemology is directly linked to the selection of Levitas's discourse models on social exclusion as well as the research methodology of phenomenography. The goal of the pragmatic approach is to create usefulness; as Wicks and Freeman (1998:129) argued, "the key question for pragmatists is whether or not information (scientific data, a novel, treaties on ethics) is useful – useful in the sense of helping people to better cope with the world or to create a better organization". Wicks and Freeman (1998:124) also described how pragmatic experimentation should be executed:

Researchers doing this type of work would see organization studies as a vehicle to help people lead better lives. It would be characterized by a focus on the practical relevance of research as well as a desire to search for novel and innovative approaches ('experimentation') that may help serve human purpose.

Levitas's work exemplifies a pragmatic approach, for her examination on welfare discourse establishes a useful set of lenses through which to interpret the structure and 'practical relevance' of how welfare is being used in public discourse. Levitas's search for 'practical relevance' promotes Wicks and Freeman's claim that the pragmatic work is to 'help serve human purpose'. As seen in Chapter Two, Levitas's research on social exclusion helps to identify the impacts of social exclusion. It further demonstrates the importance of paid work to addressing social exclusion while simultaneously identifying the lack of emphasis placed

on unpaid work, such as caring for children, as a path towards inclusion. In short, Levitas's approach only includes paid employment as a tool to address issues of exclusion.

Experts who promote 'practical relevance' reject the privileged status given to science. From this stance, science is a word game with pre-agreed-upon terms; or, as Wicks and Freeman (1998:126) put it, "a language game with a set of ground rules that one accepts before playing the game". Rorty (1985:3) put forward a similar argument:

In a laboratory, a hypothesis maybe discredited if the litmus paper turns blue, or the mercury fails to come up to a certain level. A hypothesis is agreed to have been 'verified by real world' if a computer spits out a certain number. The hardness of fact in all these cases is simply the hardness of the previous agreements within a community about the consequence of a certain event. The same hardness prevails in morality or literacy criticism if, and only if, the relevant community is equally firm about who loses and who wins.

In short, the pragmatic approach does not privilege one narrative over another. Instead, it accepts narratives from the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities-based work, literature and artistic expression. If the narrative adds to the understanding of the world around us, it is classified as useful. However, this approach does not mistakenly assume that reality is an illusion. This research, in line with the pragmatic approach, accepts that reality is a socially-constructed entity. It is the view of this thesis that the values of the world are constantly changing. Social values and social norms are constructed by the views and ideas of the time (Bryman 2008; Clarke 2001; Crotty 1998; Berger 1967). The construction of reality is affected and influenced by both the empirical and the theoretical. To maximise the potential for useful data collection while allowing for the richest possible decipherment

of that information, it is important to examine the discourse that constructs social understanding.

The pragmatic approach is also concerned with the betterment of people and organizations through actual understanding of action. Additionally, it does not participate in constructing 'fairy-tale' explanations for how things might be; rather, the pragmatic approach is concerned with how issues and action are discussed and perceived by those involved in prompting their organization to achieve a higher degree of excellence. This is why it critical to use their tools of understanding. Once again, I turn to Wicks and Freeman (1998:130) to point out that useful information can be gleaned from a variety of sources:

Pragmatists put as much emphasis on usefulness as they do on novelty; different kinds of evidence and research, including empirical studies, can be helpful in grasping the implications of alternative ways of thinking and acting in the world, and serve as useful sources of evidence to complement other insights.

The philosophy of pragmatism promotes taking in all useful information in order to arrive at knowledge and understanding about a phenomenon. From that place of discernment, action may be taken. However, that action may or may not be done to maximise production or achieve the greatest level of happiness; how one comes to understand a phenomenon (pragmatism), and how one acts in response to a phenomenon are discrete.

The pragmatic approach adopted in this thesis assisted in the selection of methodology in two significant ways. First, it helped me address equivocality, a key concept in the pragmatic approach. Karl Weick (1979: 174) contended that a phenomenon is open to interpretation:



When we assert that organizations confront equivocality, we mean that organizations live in an environment of puns (i.e. multiple plausible meanings to ascribe to a given display). The image we want to capture is not that of an environment that is disordered, indeterminate and chaotic. Instead, we want to capture the image of an environment that is rich in the possible connections that could be imposed on the equally rich assortment of possible punctuated variables.

To accomplish this type of interpretation, the organization is not to be scrutinised as an entity, but rather examined in terms of the shared experiences and thoughts of those involved that allow the organization to operate. The selected method of phenomenography does just that – focuses on shared understandings within a specific social structure.

Second, the pragmatic approach provided a bridge between the theory of philanthropy and its practical application. Wicks and Freeman (1998:136) maintained that an important component to academic research is bridging that gap; they encouraged academic researchers to remain focused on relevance and practical applicability:

While pragmatism is sometimes questioned for being focused on the applied, it is clearly not a-theoretical or anti-theoretical. Pragmatism offers a helpful check to ensure that the debates and discussions of academics do not become so esoteric that they are irrelevant – arguments of differences that don't make a difference – and don't help us live better lives. Pragmatism reminds us that academic speculation and theorizing must ultimately – not necessarily in the short or medium term – prove to be of use in how people live their lives. However, it does see the importance and value of theory as a mechanism to help explain and predict phenomena, in order to direct human actions, and shape practice to create sustainable benefit.

Academic and practitioners alike are concerned with the application of theory in philanthropic studies. The goal of theory is to present a general explanation of understanding. Robert Donmoyer (2009:709) identified a particular concern regarding theory in philanthropic research from the perspective of the practitioner:

Theory is inherently general; indeed, the ideal types that are the basic building blocks in social science theory intentionally strip away uniqueness and purposely simplify the complexity of the phenomena they ostensibly describe. Practitioners, on the other hand, inhabit a world in which the atypical is often commonplace and where the exception may have to be accommodated and even, at times, treated as the rule if one wants to be effective.

Employing a pragmatic epistemology can lead to a greater understanding of philanthropy and can thus be developed to benefit the lives of those that participate in philanthropy. Pragmatism allows philanthropy studies to eschew the one-sided relationship of theoretical understanding by including discussions of the issues and concerns from stakeholders in the field. To develop an understanding from the stakeholders' perspectives, this chapter will next introduce phenomenography, the approach this study adopts.

#### 5.4 Phenomenography

This section will explain how employing a phenomenographical approach along with using Levitas's discourse models will assist in creating a 'practical' and 'useful' description of how the RPA's Benevolent Fund participates in the discussion of player welfare.

Phenomenography differs from phenomenology in so far as phenomenology asks 'what is there in the world?' while phenomenography asks 'what is there in people's perceptions of the world?' (Webb 1997). The term phenomenography is derived from the Greek

*phainonmenon*, meaning appearance, and *graphen*, meaning description; therefore, phenomenography is the description of appearances (Hasselgren and Beach 1997). Marton (1986:31) defined phenomenography as “a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them”. Phenomenography was originally used in the early 1970’s at the University of Gotenborg in Sweden, where the approach was designed for educational research purposes to measure enquires about thinking and learning.

The approach is useful because everyone experiences and perceives the world around him or her differently; thus each individual’s understanding of an action will be experienced and perceived differently as well. Phenomenographers attempt to understand the multiple meanings that a specific group of people may have for a specific phenomenon.

Phenomenographic research typically involves identifying and categorising meanings by looking for the links that connect relationships (Entwistle 1997). Barnard, McCosker, and Gerber (1999) identified similar characteristics of the approach, emphasising how phenomenography focuses on structure and importance through conceptual thought and an emphasis on collective meaning.

In this research, in order to establish a collective understanding of the RPA’s Benevolent Funds purpose, the interviews focused on the participants’ experiences as well as the participants’ perceptions of the phenomenon (Hitchcock 2006). The design of the research is focused on the collective experience of those who operate the RPA’s Benevolent Fund (Akerland 2005). I based some of my outcome goals on Marton and Booth’s (1997:130) argument that the desired outcome of the interview is the interpretation of interviewee’s

understanding, or “working toward an articulation of the interviewee’s reflection on the experience that is as complete as possible”. In order to achieve this, I organised the transcriptions of the completed interviews into ‘categories of description’ (Akerland 2005; Uljens 1996; Marton 1986). These descriptions aided in the understanding of the creation and operation of the RPA’s Benevolent Fund from the perspective of those who operate and benefit from the Foundation. Akerland (2005: 72) stated that, “Phenomenography provides a way of looking at collective human experience of phenomena holistically despite the fact that such phenomena may be perceived differently by different people and under different circumstances”. This research provided just that opportunity.

The method allows the research to ask a ‘what is there in people’s perceptions of the world?’ type question, which is not a declaration of reality but rather a statement about the experience of reality. Marton (1986:33) articulated it thus: “a careful account of the different way people think about phenomena may help uncover conditions that facilitate the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively ‘better’ perception of reality”. In order to uncover the phenomena of the RPA’s Benevolent Fund and examine how they may facilitate a transition in how players in professional rugby union think about welfare, the next several sections will address this research study’s design and data collection process.

### 5.5 Research Design

Cohen et al. (2000; 92) argued that, “The quality of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted”. Booth (1992; 66) similarly argued that the integrity of the methodological approach “lies in the match between the goals of the study and its design and execution”. For Booth, this includes the make-up of the sample group,

the environment in which the interview occurs, the structural approach and design of the interview and how the analysis of the collected data is processed. For research that engages in phenomenography, it is essential that the study participants are suitable and pertinent to the research questions. The outcome of the investigation is the identification of shared understanding among those who participate in the phenomenon. Without vigilant scrutiny of those selected to participate, the academic community cannot critique the legitimacy of the claims of the research. The following section, along with Tables 5.1 and 5.2, will identify how the participants for this research were purposefully selected to adequately address the research questions.

#### 5.5.1 The Sample Groups

This research consists of two independent sampling groups: first, the Board of Trustees of the RPA's Benevolent Fund and, second, members of the RPA who are eligible to benefit from the Foundation. The Board of Trustees consisted of those described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Biographies of the Board of Trustees

RPA Benevolent Trustees	Biography
Damian Hopley	A graduate of St Andrews and Cambridge University, Hopley played for Wasps and England but was forced to retire from professional rugby in 1998 after a series of knee operations. The lack of support available to professional players led Hopley to found the RPA later that same year.

	<p>He is the driving force behind the RPA and his influence ensures that players' rights are protected and represented at all levels within the sport. Hopley has been the principal negotiator for both the England and British &amp; Irish Lions players' contracts since 2001. He is currently Chairman of the International Rugby Players' Association (IRPA).</p>
David Barnes	<p>Former Bath prop and RPA Chairman, Barnes joined the RPA full time as Rugby Director in 2011, having played over 200 games for Bath since his debut against Harlequins in 2000. He is now responsible for issues including player welfare, contractual disputes and implementing the Player Development Programme.</p>
Mark Champion	<p>Champion is the Managing Director of Champion Willcocks, providing project and change management services to some of the UK's largest financial and public sector organizations. Champion is an original</p>

	<p>investor in the US-based NYLO Hotels chain.</p> <p>He is also an investor and adviser to Paythru, a specialist mobile payments provider, and Active Navigation, an intelligent data archive software business.</p> <p>Campion is also a non-executive Director of the RPA, Vice Chairman of the Fundraising Board of Fields in Trust (FIT) and has recently joined the Advisory Board of Imagine Sports Ltd.</p>
Vic Luck	<p>Luck is a successful leader and Board member of large international businesses, including IBM and PricewaterhouseCoopers, with wide experience in strategic organizational development, performance and financial management. Luck also sits on the Board of The Chartered Institute of Public Finance &amp; Accountancy and is a Director of The Foundation for Leadership through Sport – a charity that enables better leadership among sporting bodies and high-performance athletes. He is also a leadership coach to national league hockey,</p>

	<p>rugby and netball squads, university football and cricket teams, and advises a number of professional athletes on their careers after sport.</p>
Bill Page	<p>Page is an experienced business leader who has held a variety of senior management posts within the wine and spirits industry. From 2001 to 2006 he was Managing Director, then Chairman, of Mentzendorff – the UK distributors for Bollinger Champagne, Taylor’s Ports and a range of leading wine brands. Bill is also Chairman of The Wine &amp; Spirit Education Trust and President of High Wycombe RUFC.</p>

The purpose of choosing the first group was to develop an understanding of the organization’s discourse from those that have direct influence and control over the organization’s performance, mission and actions.

#### 5.5.1.1 Gaining Access to the RPA’s Benevolent Fund

Gaining access to the RPA’s Benevolent Fund was the result of a casual conversation at a Durham University fitness centre with one of the university rugby coaches about my research. Following that conversation, the coach put me in contact with David Barnes, a Durham University graduate, former professional player, past Chairman of the RPA’s



Benevolent Foundation and the current RPA Rugby manager responsible for player welfare and employment issues for Aviva Premiership Rugby club players. Mr Barnes agreed to participate and directed me to the Foundation's Executive Director, Ms Amada Ewe. From that point on, all communication was made through Ms Ewe.

I could have encountered significant issues of 'gate keeping', which would have prevented access to the Foundation. Organizations like these are typically small, with very few personnel. It would have been easier for the Foundation to turn down the request to participate. That potential hurdle was eliminated, however, since the request was made directly to the chairman through a personal connection. Nevertheless, one must be careful about the appearance of usurping a staff member's powers. I felt it was important to be respectful of Ewe's authority; as such, I made clear that all scheduling decisions regarding communications I would have with the organization would be at the discretion of the Executive Director. The Executive Director was asked specifically how she would like to proceed with the research as well as how others in the organization should be contacted. To gain the respect of the organization and to establish a level of rapport and credibility, I felt it was important to share my experience as the Executive Director of a similar organization. This is similar to the work of Salisbury (1994), who emphasised her past as a teacher to gain trust while conducting research on teachers in training. I may, however, have been too eager to disclose my professional past. I am not convinced that having done so was critical to gaining access to the organization but, as I will address later, I do feel it aided me in gleaning deeper information once I gained access to the research subjects and assisted in the analysis process of the research.

After the initial phases of the data analysis process of the primary sample group [the Board of Directors], it became evident that an RPA membership perspective was needed to ensure the legitimacy of the organization's claims. The second sample group – the rugby players themselves – was also employed to eliminate any possible effects of “Group Think”.

The second group of RPA members consisted of 24 professional rugby union players ranging from those in their first year to those with eight years' professional experience. The inclusion of a group of professional athletes helped to ensure that the shared understanding of the Trustees corresponded with or related to those with whom they are attempting to assist. Without developing an understanding of welfare and retirement preparation from the players' perspective, it would be difficult to determine if the Benevolent Fund was addressing the actual welfare needs of the professional rugby union athlete. If from the analysis of the players' discourse emerged a different understanding of player welfare and retirement preparation, it would show that the policy initiatives of the Benevolent Fund were not in line with the welfare needs of professional rugby union players.

#### 5.5.1.2 Gaining Access to Professional Rugby Union Players

After speaking with the Foundation's Board of Trustees, I felt compelled to gain the perspectives of those individuals the programmes were designed to benefit – professional rugby union players. Gaining access to players proved more challenging than gaining access to the key figures of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. I did not want to ask the RPA for a list of possible players to contact, as I did not want to risk speaking to a group of players who were handpicked by the Foundation. Using another means to find them would reduce the risk of prejudicial statements in favour of the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund. For this study to

be consistent with the pragmatic epistemology position outlined above, there had to be the potential for critique; in other words, it was important that I approached players whose perspective regarding player representation might conflict with that of the organization's perspective.

My first two attempts to solicit participation resulted in less than favourable outcomes. I started by reviewing team websites and selecting players based on the seasons in which they played in order to retrieve a mixture of playing histories. My list included veterans (six or more seasons), middle range (four to five seasons) and those new to professional rugby playing (one to three season). After making my selection, I attempted direct contact them via social networking sites; this garnered no responses. I tried a more traditional approach for my second attempt; I sent a formal letter to thirty players on Durham University letterhead, but this produced only one response. Considering the success of the aforementioned conversation in the fitness centre that had resulted in gaining access to the Benevolent Fund, I started to ask people I knew if they might know a professional player or have contacts in a professional club. Once again, conversing with people at the fitness centre proved to be useful. From those conversations, I gained access to a couple of players in the professional academy structure as well some in the professional rank. I then used those exposers to campaign for more participation, which was also successful.

Two other avenues proved to be useful. First, a former Durham student who became employed with a professional team helped me source interview participants from within his club structure. Second, a friend once had a personal relationship with a professional player, which led to further contacts. I had considered contacting sports agents who represent professional rugby union players as a way of gaining access to professional athletes.

Identifying agents who represent RPA members would have been relatively easy as the RPA performs a vetting process of all individuals and/or Management Companies prior to allowing them to represent a RPA member. However having had personal experience working with sports agents in my previous professional career I elected not to contact agents as a recruitment tool. I felt that contacting agents to gain access could create an additional level of gate keeping. The agent could have established additional barriers thus slowing the research or they could prevent their client's participation all together. By going directly to the athlete and asking him to introduce me to their fellow players allowed me to bypass any potential agent interference or control.

The main lesson I learned about gaining access to interview subjects was that active participation was crucial to success. A passive approach – e-mails and letters – was far less effective than directly engaging in conversation in order to gain access.

The group of 24 players that ended up participating in this study proved useful, as they represented a range of experience in the professional game. The sample consisted of players ranging from their first year as a professional athlete to their ninth. As such, the data was drawn from a range of time experience and therefore was able to reveal an evolution in how welfare is discussed. The sample also consisted of athletes representing clubs from various regions of the country. Collecting data from several regions prevented the discussion about how welfare is perceived from being skewed towards one particular club or one particular region of the country.

Table 5.2 Professional Athlete Participant Pseudonym Table

Years Played	Pseudonym	Division of Play
1	Player 1	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 2	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 3	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 4	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 5	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 6	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 7	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 8	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 9	Aviva Premiership Rugby
1	Player 10	Aviva Premiership Rugby
2	Player 11	Aviva Premiership Rugby
2	Player 12	Aviva Premiership Rugby
4	Player 13	Aviva Premiership Rugby
4	Player 14	Aviva Premiership Rugby
4	Player 15	Aviva Premiership Rugby
5	Player 16	Aviva Premiership Rugby
5	Player 17	Aviva Premiership Rugby
5	Player 18	Aviva Premiership Rugby
5	Player 19	Aviva Premiership Rugby
6	Player 20	Aviva Premiership Rugby
6	Player 21	Aviva Premiership Rugby

6	Player 22	Aviva Premiership Rugby
8	Player 23	Aviva Premiership Rugby
9	Player 24	Aviva Premiership Rugby

Once players decided to participate, they signed confidentiality agreements that granted full anonymity to the player; neither their names nor any association to clubs past or present would be referenced in the research. The participants were asked about the RPA, the Benevolent Fund, the academy structure and the welfare mechanisms in the sport. An analysis of the responses to these questions will be presented in Chapter Seven.

#### 5.5.2 Interviews

The phenomenographic approach is completely centred on interviews (Hitchcock 2006; Akerland 2005; Marton & Booth 1997). As identified earlier in this chapter, this research has two small critical sample groups of interview subjects: 1) the Board of Trustees and staff members of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, and 2) those who are professional players in English rugby union. The goal was not only to obtain a description of the phenomenon, but also to see the relationship between the actor, the agency and the phenomenon (Bowden 2005). The product of the interview is a reflection of the subjects' understanding or, as described by Martin and Brooks (1997:130), the "working toward an articulation of the interviewee's reflection on the experience that is as complete as possible". Since the existing literature on the subject of player welfare in rugby union is so incomplete, I felt certain the interview, which would result in the players' speaking about the relatively new phenomenon subjectively, was the best tool for gaining understanding about the participants' experiences.

Sociologists typically classify interview approaches as unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Gratton & Jones 2004; Marvasti 2004; Robson 2002; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). This research employed a semi-structured interview construction with purposefully selected interview subjects. Gratton and Jones (2004:141) stated that the semi-structured interview is one that uses a set of pre-established questions as the tool of enquiry, but added that they are not to be executed rigidly: "... the researcher adopts a flexible approach to data collection, and can alter the sequences of questions or probe for more information with subsidiary questions". I conducted all the interviews face-to-face as well and then coded and analysed all the data to ensure a level of consistency in both the interview delivery and in the data analysis. In both groups (players and RPA's Trustees and staff), the interviews were carried out as a dialogue rather than as a battery of questions; the focus was the themes of their experiences, understanding and perceptions (Marton 1997). Since in the interview approach, the responses to questions are expressions of one's feelings and perceptions (Bowden 2005), "a paramount requirement for phenomenography is to be sensitive to the individuality of conceptions of the world" (Ashworth & Lucas 2000; 297).

The semi-structured interview provides several advantages for the data collection process. First, it allows the subject to express his or her feelings, emotions and perceptions and allows him or her to elaborate on areas of interest. Second, the semi-structured design allows the researcher to gain greater depth and insight from the interviewee regarding his or her perception of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview makes room for opportunities to explore facets of a subject that were not originally foreseen; other research methods may not allow for the flexibility for unplanned discovery. As well, conducting interviews face-to-face permits the researcher to consider body language and tone. During the transcription of the interviews, I felt it was important to identify the tone

of responses. Without considering tone and context, the intent or even the meaning of certain statements could be mistakenly interpreted. Finally, the face-to-face exchange allows for the development of rapport, which facilitates the building of trust and the potential for greater honesty and candour.

The face-to-face interaction also places the researcher under the interrogation lamp; thus, it is important to establish professionalism and credibility. Goffman (2002) addressed the issues of the “self-conscious” and the presentation of self in an interview setting.

Presenting oneself as a professional, both in speech and appearance, helps to establish the legitimacy of the researcher and to highlight the importance of the subject’s participation. Appearance can also establish a relationship level, as Hammersely and Atkinson (1995:87) noted:

Where an explicit research role must be constructed, forms of dress can give off the message that the ethnographer seeks to maintain the position of an acceptable marginal member perhaps in relationship to audience. They may declare affinity between researcher and hosts, and/or they may distance the ethnographer from constraining identities.

One potential drawback of the semi-structured interview is the possible limitations the structured element could impose on the amount of information that emerges from the interview; in other words, an overly-structured interview may prevent the participant from fully expressing his or her thoughts or beliefs or exploring beyond the structure, which could in turn limit the results (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Another concern is the potential lack of consistency in the engagement of the semi-structured interview. In this research, even though the themes of each interview were similar, they were not identical. The flexible



nature of the interview allowed some participants to explore areas which others did not, provoking significantly different statements. Moreover, follow-up questions could also affect the analysis process (Patton 1980). The open-ended design makes the collected data difficult to measure analytically, as it cannot be broken down into simple elements or principles.

Therefore, when selecting a tool such as the interview, the researcher must be aware of the limitations of the approach and of the anxieties the format may produce in the participants. Below, I address the limitations of this approach and the anxieties this research may have produced in the participants.

Experts have noted that the face-to-face interview potentially requires more time and financial resources than other research tools (Brustad et al. 2003). These potential increases can lead researchers to draw on a smaller sample, resulting in an inaccurate representation of the group of interest (Sandelowski 1995). This was not a concern with this study's first sample group since the RPA's Benevolent Foundation is small in structure and I was able to secure complete participation from all members of the Board of Trustees and current staff. The second interview group, however, was affected by this hurdle. I attempted to conduct as many interviews as reasonably possible; yet, sampling has the ability to be inexhaustible. Thus, a level of saturation must be determined. Glaser and Struass (1967:61) defined theory saturation as that point when, "no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop the properties of the category". This resonates with other studies (Sandelowski 1995; Eisenhardt 1989) which identified saturation as the point in the data collection that a consistent and repetitious response is starting to emerge from the sample group. I felt I had achieved a justifiable level of saturation with the combination of

the players that were interviewed for this research project and Byrne's (2011) interviews of professional rugby union players in Ireland. The dominant narratives of the players as well as the Trustees/staff of the RPA's Benevolent Foundation is represented in Chapters Six and Seven.

It should also be pointed out that the participants in this research are classified as elite interview subjects. Lilker (2003:207) defined elite interview subjects as "those with close proximity to power". The Trustees are the stewards of the mission of the Benevolent Fund and the financial resources that allow it to function. The Trustees are 'elite' in the sense that they have the direct power to dictate the actions of the Foundation. They are also elite in the sense that they hold the power during the interview process: "Elite interviewing is characterized by a situation in which the balance is in favour of the respondent" (Burhman et al. 2004:205). Each participant selected the time, date and location of the interview that best fit within his personal schedule. Participants had the right and ability at any time to stop the interview, reject my question or even shut down the research completely.

When designing an interview structure for an 'elite interview subject', is it important not to confine the subject to a limited set of answers, which is why the semi-structured approach is advantageous. The 'elite' interviewee is typically accustomed to a level of independent thought and does not like to be constrained. Aberback and Rockman (2002:674) argued that, "Elites especially, but other highly educated people as well, do not like being put in a straightjacket of closed-ended questions. They prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think". For this reason, the open-ended interview structure is more advantageous for gaining the information the researcher sets out to capture. However, since, the 'elite interview subjects' may dominate the discussion, wanting to lead

the interview in a different direction, the researcher must be equipped to keep the participant on task and not lose control of the interview session.

Some experts have argued that it is more difficult to gain access to interview “elite” groups (Sabot 1999). For this study, gaining access to the elite administration structure was unproblematic, while gaining access to elite athletes was a greater task. Studies have shown that even after gaining access, elite interview subjects can present a series of concerns.

Smith (2006:644) argued that the elite interview subject possesses a greater ability to influence the data and “[elite interview subjects] are better equipped to protect themselves and are better positioned to manipulate research results and dissemination”. Relatedly, Aberbach and Rockman (2002) contended that several considerations should be taken when designing an open- or closed-ended interview for ‘elite’ interview subjects. One is that researchers should determine the amount of research that currently exists on a topic prior designing their interview. This thesis examines a charity structure which is virtually unexplored. The use of a closed-ended interview design would not have achieved the desired level of understanding since the study set out to understand and explain the social factors that create and sustain such organizations. The closed-ended would have constrained the participants not allowing for a fully robust understanding to be expressed.

Another concern of the face-to-face interview is the researcher could taint the subject through verbal and non-verbal body language. The participant could interpret the verbal and non-verbal actions and attempt to provide what they perceived as the ‘correct’ answer rather than an ‘authentic’ answer. It is also a possibility that the interviewee may have problems recalling information, may not know the correct information or may have a misperception of the correct information. The quality of data is completely dependent on

the quality of the participant. Those selected need to have the ability to provide knowledgeable and thoughtful information which will provide insight into the phenomenon in question. It is also important to ensure a level of comfort with the participant. This can be partially achieved by informing the participant about who will be privy to the information they are going to – probably anonymously – share.

Before the interviews started for this study, the interviewees were informed that there were no wrong responses to the questions and that the researcher was not looking for ‘right’ responses. The interviewees were assured that not knowing an answer or not having an opinion on a subject was perfectly appropriate. Only once did an interview subject not have an answer, and that was due to not having historical knowledge of a sequence of events.

Wolcott’s (2002) research on framing an interview provided this study with several basic principles to help produce quality data. First, Wolcott urged researchers to discuss the level of formality of the interview with the interview subject. Second, Wolcott reminded the researcher that interviewing is an exercise in active listening. The researcher should talk less and listen more. To achieve this, questions should be short, concise and to the point. The questions should also centre on several big ideas which are central to the research. Third, Wolcott suggested the interview should be transcribed as soon as possible after the interview has occurred.

As I identified earlier in this chapter (as well as in the introduction to this thesis), I was the Executive Director of a Foundation that provided financial assistance to offset the medical and living expenses of athletes who were injured while participating in the sport of bull riding. The Rider Relief Fund (RRF) is the charitable division of Professional Bull Riders Inc.

(PBR). PBR is the international sanctioning body for the sport of bull riding, with offices in the United States (world headquarters), Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Australia. The RRF's provision to athletes who became injured while participating in the sport of bull riding was purely financial, an approach indicative of Levitas's RED theoretical model.

Having a personal relationship with a research topic does have the potential to bias the researcher's data collection and data analysis. (Coffey 1999). LeCompte, Preissle and Tesch (1993:92) argue that the researcher is a lens that biases all data: "the identity of the data collector mediates all other identities and roles played by the investigator". Coffey (1999:20) identified fieldwork into impersonal territory as a social process; the researcher is a "stranger" travelling down a path that will eventually lead him or her to "familiarity" and "enlightenment". Conversely, the journey of a researcher with pre-existing knowledge or, as Hodkinson (2005) put it, "insider" knowledge, ventures down a different path, one where the research already has a degree of knowledge. Hermann (2001) made similar observations and yet contended that, regardless of a researcher's 'insider' or 'outsider' status, he or she will invariably possess preconceived notions of the phenomenon that will affect the collection and analysis of the data.

On that subject, Labaree (2002; 103) identified several advantages of possessing 'insider' knowledge: "first, the value of shared experience; second, the value of greater access; third, the value of cultural interpretation and the value of deeper understanding and clarity of thought". By contrast, Coffey (1999;103) warned that too much familiarity may produce subpar research: "a researcher who is no longer able to stand back from the esoteric knowledge they have acquired and whose perspective becomes indistinguishable from that of the host, may face analytic problems ". Other critics have maintained that there is a need

to establish some level of strangeness (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Lofland & Lofland 1995). Having not been particularly exposed to the sport of rugby union or introduced to how the charity actually operates in the United Kingdom, I was able to occupy a dramatically different space than I would have in my country of origin as well as the sport and sports structure of professional rugby union was unfamiliar.

Herod (1999) wrote about the benefits a non-native researcher reaps when conducting research on elite level subjects. Herod found that being a foreigner positively influenced the responses of those being interviewed. In his own research he found that as a non-native interviewing elite subjects, he received a level of favour which was beneficial to the information-gathering process. Sabot (1999) experienced similar results, arguing that she was given better access to greater amounts of information because of her “foreign” status. My experience was similar to Herod and Sabot’s; I felt that the trustees provided me with more detailed information on account of my non-English status and my lack of exposure to rugby. I was surprised by the amount of information they provided. I was particularly surprised by the candour of all my participants, including the players. I cannot specifically say it was my non-British status that granted me this perceived better access, but my status as an American conducting research in a sport that is not widely popular in my homeland could easily have added to their openness. The interviews provided a more complete backdrop of the sport, which ensured I had a level of clarity that may not have been afforded to a native, whom they might have assumed would know the historical and socio-economic background of rugby union.

As stated earlier, I do not feel my disclosure of my past professional role in sports charity helped me gain access to the organization, but I do feel it helped me acquire information

from the trustees and staff. Their willingness to provide profoundly detailed information may have been a tactic to show me, a former Executive Director of a similar organization, that they had all proper controls in place and were fulfilling the organization's fundamental mission. If I had been a layperson without a background in not-for-profit management, their answers may have been less detailed and provided less evidence of justification for their actions and existence. I think my own background also gave them a desire to boast about their accomplishments to someone who understood the regular trials and tribulations facing an organization like the Benevolent Fund.

### 5.5.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in phenomenography is one of discovery and construction (Hasselgren & Beach 1997). The results emerge in the form of common themes and ideas, as the transcripts are analysed and reconsidered. What begins as individual perception becomes part of a collective understanding that will eventually lead to the identification of the most commonly shared experiences.

The analysis and interpretation phase of the data collected in this research followed Akerland's (2005) direction and included an emphasis on the structural relationships between the categories and the outcome space (ranked levels of shared experience). Akerland (2005) maintained that it is vital for phenomenography analysis to emphasise structure – a keystone of phenomenography – as structure increases the practical applications for the results (Akerland 2005). Akerland's emphasis on structure is shared by Silver and Gill (1999) and Levitas (2005; 1996a; 1996b), each of whom maintained that providing 'practical relevance' facilitates the utility of research, increases social solidarity and provides a tool for the betterment of existence. To identify structure, the interview

transcripts must be used to uncover the core nature of the social structure. It achieves this by determining the dominantly-shared understandings of the participating individuals who are, in the case of this study, addressing questions related to the welfare of professional rugby union athletes.

For this study, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I made note of any changes in the environment, including any interruptions and/or environmental changes. Transcripts also noted if a particular tone was present during the interview (e.g. sarcasm). I felt it was necessary to add 'descriptors' to ensure the integrity of the interview. Following Akerland (2005), each transcript represents an individual perception of a shared experience within a particular set of questions. The transcripts were analysed and categorised into a hierarchical arrangement, from the most shared responses to the least shared responses. Following Bowden and Green (2005), the process began with the reading and re-reading of all the gathered transcripts as one full set of data. Transcripts with similar experiences were then grouped together into categories, using quotes from the transcripts. Green pointed out that this first attempt would most likely be incorrect and would inevitably require a second attempt, but it would also provide a different perspective for viewing the data which would be revisited repeatedly in order to create deeper understandings of the established categories (Bowden & Green 2005). As each interview was revisited, the outcome space of the trustees' statements was expressed either in terms of providing redistributive care, such as direct payments, or in terms of participating in a model of social investment opportunities that would allow the players to acquire employment if and when they transitioned out of a career in professional sport. These two options complemented Levitas's dominant discourse models in how they addressed social exclusion which, in



essence, is the goal of the Benevolent Fund: “to support professional players who have been forced to retire from the game due to serious injury or illness” (Restart 2012).

While many remarks fit comfortably into categories that identified common themes, the experiences that did not fall within any of the established categories also needed to be included in the understanding of the phenomenon. Bowden encouraged researchers who are conducting phenomenography to continually ask themselves if there are alternative ways to interpret statements made by the interviewee (Bowden 2005); with this in mind, it must also be highlighted that the research can only include what is in the transcripts, and the researcher cannot make speculations or inferences. At the conclusion of the analysis process, all the transcripts had been sorted into categories with defined statements of description. Once all the categories were completed with supporting quotations from the transcripts, the relationships between categories started to emerge (Akerland 2005; Uljens 1996; Marton 1986). The categories were ranked from the most shared experiences to the least. The ranking was intended to establish the hierarchical levels of shared experiences. This hierarchical ranking of the categories is referred to as the outcome space (Akerland 2005).

The outcome space identifies the common and shared experiences of those who participate in the phenomenon of charity or, as contended by Uljens (1996), the outcome space – along with the structure – becomes the fundamental nature of the phenomenon. In the present study, the shared outcome space identified a profound common understanding about the risk of employability after a professional career in sports. The interviews identified key structural changes which occurred as a result of the transition of rugby union from an amateur game into a professional sport. These changes underscored the need to create

mechanisms of care that not only addressed the current hardship or injury at the time, but also prepared the athlete for retirement and long-term care. Chapters Six and Seven identify the trustees' shared understanding for the cause as well as the need for the Benevolent Fund. Those chapters demonstrate how Levitas's conceptual approach is a useful lens for determining in what ways the Benevolent Fund Trustees participate in the discussion of athlete welfare. The approach also aids in understanding the potential contributions the RPA's Benevolent Fund may make to the larger social debate concerning charity and its relationship to welfare deficit.

The interviews conducted with the professional players were likewise semi-structured and were also similarly analysed. However, while the purpose of the analysis of the RPA was one of "discovery" and "construction" (Hasselgren & Beach 1997), player interviews were examined for validity and confirmation. As stated earlier in this chapter, I felt it was critical that the shared outcome space expressed by the Board of Trustees of the Benevolent Fund was a fair reflection of the reality of the structure of professional rugby. Without a player perspective, any potential dissidence would not be voiced. The analysis of the information gathered from the players was done in a reflective<sup>25</sup> fashion, against the trustee analysis. Levitas's theoretical framework was also helpful for determining the players' outcome space. Like the trustees, the players' comments were oriented in terms of either RED or SID, and uncovered that the reason for the organization was to help address the welfare concerns which emerged as a result of professionalism.

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<sup>25</sup> Reflective is used not in terms of "reflective analysis"; it is simply employed here to mean "mirroring the sentiments of the trustees". For more information on reflective analysis, see Mauthner, N. S. and Doucet, A.,. (2003). "Reflexive Accounts and Accounts of Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis." *Sociology* 37(3): 413-431.

Identifying the concerns of the interview process itself was not the only task; once the information was collected, it was essential to responsibly determine how to process that gathered information as well as how to extract meaningful understanding from it. Joppe (2000:1) identified reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable”. Joppe (2000:1) also noted that validity “determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit ‘the bull’s eye’ of your research object? Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series of questions, and will often look for the answers in the research of others”.

Qualitative research attempts to understand phenomena in the context in which it occurs through the use of naturalistic approaches. Patton (2002:39) argued the goal is to develop an understanding of knowledge in a real world setting: “... the research does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest.” This is vastly different from the goal of quantitative research which looks for determination and the ability to predict action. The qualitative researcher searches for a deeper level of discernment and the ability to translate that understanding to other situations (Hoepfl 1997). Gratton and Jones (2004:150) argued that reliability and validity in face-to-face interviews can be increased through the “standardised interview schedule, maintaining a consistent interviewing environment, and recording with the interviewees’ permission, which should then be transcribed within as short a time as possible by the researcher”.

Prior to the commencement of the analysis phase of the research, I was concerned that the shared description of the purpose and function of the Benevolent Fund would be so

stratified that it would be difficult to establish a convincing argument of a dominantly-shared language. However, I was amazed at the level of consistency expressed by the Board of Trustees. It was the consistency of their comments which led me to adopt Levitas's discourse models for the lenses through which I would analyse the findings from the data collection. Once I was able to read the transcripts of the interviews as a manuscript rather than as individual accounts, the commonly-shared understanding about their organization's purpose became very apparent. This allowed me to identify a theoretical framework in which to present the empirical findings related to how the organization protected player welfare by mitigating the risk of social exclusion.

## 5.6 Ethics

Robson (2002) identified that the role of ethics in social research is to define the roles and responsibilities between the researcher, those participating in the research and the information that results from the participation. Marvasti (2004; 134-135) stated that "Most researchers, regardless of their discipline or metrological orientation, recognize while working with human subjects certain steps must be taken to protect the dignity and safety of the research participants". This research complied with the ethical standards set forth by both the British Sociological Association and the University of Durham. All those who participated in this research did so knowingly and willingly. No individual or group of individuals was forced, threatened and/or deceived. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and no rewards, financial or otherwise, were offered in exchange for their participation. All participants were provided an informed consent form detailing their rights as a voluntary participant of the research project. The consent form outlined the terms of confidentiality regarding their statements, storage of their statements and any

potential future use of their statements. Prior to each interview, a prewritten script was read to the interviewee, informing them of their rights of participation. Each participant signed a form, acknowledging they were participating with consent and without coercion. There were not any ethical concerns while conducting this research. My main ethical concern was presenting an authentic and honest account of the statements of those who participated in the research. To the best of my ability, I attempted to present an account of my findings without personal bias and prejudice.

### 5.7 Conclusion

This research employs the methodological approach of phenomenography (Hasselgren & Beach 1997; Webb 1997; Marton 1986). This approach was purposefully selected to aid in developing an understanding about how the players and trustees of the RPA's Benevolent Fund view the purpose of their operation and the factors that caused the need for their existence. This approach is uniquely appropriate to this particular research project, as no work exists on the creation and operation of the RPA, the RPA's Benevolent Fund or non-profit intervention in welfare for the professional athlete. Phenomenography allowed the research to discover the core nature of the organization's intentions; the reduction of social exclusion of the post professional athlete. This discovery was expedited by the use of Levitas's discourse model as a tool to help interpret the Foundation's participation in addressing the welfare concerns and needs of the professional rugby player.

Structurally, this chapter identified how the research gained access to the groups of interest. The chapter also recognized the purpose of and reason for the selection of semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the key data collection tool. Also recognized in the chapter are some of the issues and concerns that a researcher must be cognisant of when

utilising particular data gathering tools and approaches, including semi-structured face-to-face interviews and interviewing those who are classified as 'elite interview subjects'.

Finally, the chapter disclosed my own personal proximity to the research and the possible positive and negative influences that could have on the data collection and data analysis.

The results presented in the following chapters are a product of the empirical data gathered by employing the methodological approach of phenomenography and analysed through the theoretical lens of Levitas.

## Chapter 6

### The Rise of the RPA's Benevolent Fund: Zero to SID

#### 6.1 Introduction

To ensure a proper understanding of how the RPA's Benevolent Fund addresses the issue of player welfare, it is critical to be aware of the purpose of the foundation as articulated by those individuals who develop, enact and administrate the functions of the organization. Therefore, in this chapter, I draw upon qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with all five members of the Board of Trustees that represented the Benevolent Foundation in 2012 and Damian Hopley, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Rugby Players' Association. From this data, two main arguments are presented. First, prior to the work of the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund, the welfare mechanisms available to professional rugby union players were limited. Second, the work of the Benevolent Fund has evolved from being an organization providing redistribution-based welfare to reduce the symptoms of social exclusion to an organization promoting personal investment-based welfare to provide athletes with the means to reduce social exclusion.

In this chapter I will show that the RPA's Benevolent Fund is an example of a non-profit organization forging a path in providing welfare mechanisms for professional rugby union players in England. To establish these two arguments, I will use Levitas's discourse models as the analytical tools for examining how the Board of Trustees talk about the issues which caused the creation of RPA policy.

The chapter will emphatically recognise the need for welfare mechanisms; it will additionally highlight the evolutionary process the organization took and is currently taking to address the needs of professional rugby union players in England.

## 6.2 Charitable Intervention in Rugby Union

The role of charitable intervention is not new to rugby union in England. The current RFU refers to the rugby union community as a “Friendly Society”. The RPA fulfils the role of the “Friendly Society” in that it administers welfare provisions for its members. Put more formally, a “Friendly Society” is a:

Mutual aid organization formed voluntarily by individuals to protect members against debts incurred through illness, death, or old age. Friendly societies arose in 17th- and 18th-century Europe and England and became most numerous in the 19th century. They trace their roots to the burial societies of Greek and Roman artisans and the guilds of medieval Europe. In attempting to define the magnitude of the risk against which they guarded and to determine how much members should contribute to meet that risk, friendly societies used what is now the basic principle of insurance<sup>26</sup>.

Before the days of professional rugby union if a player was injured, he or she would simply use the services of the National Health Service (NHS) and, as established in Chapters Two and Three, if the injury occurred in the pre-professional days, the player would simply return to his or her professional non-playing career. If the injury was career ending, local clubs would rally to raise funds to help with the immediate hardship. Player Twenty-Five, a

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<sup>26</sup> Concise Encyclopaedia, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/friendly%20society>. [Accessed 29/4/2013].



former elite athlete who played before the days of professional rugby union, spoke of such occurrences: “If someone would get hurt bad enough that [it] put them out of work, his club or the clubs from around the area would have a dinner that would raise money, or even a charity game that would benefit [the injured player]” (Player Twenty-Five, Personal Interview, 6 June 2012). RPA Benevolent Fund Trustee Bill Page also spoke of the strong sense of community related to assisting a fellow player: “So if you have a situation in a club, be it professional or amateur, where someone has had their whole life changed by a serious injury, you would often find that club or a group of clubs in the area getting together to do something to help” (Page, Bill. Personal Interview. 29 September 2011). The loose band of ad hoc organizations which acted to benefit the injured player was participating in what was identified in Chapter Four by Esping-Anderson and Myles (2009) as “vertical redistribution”. Vertical redistribution is simply when one group gives to another group. The commonly used example in the academic literature is when resources are reallocated between those who are healthy and those who are sick or, in the case of this thesis those who are injured (Esping-Anderson & Myles 2009). The action of redistribution of resources though loosely-organised community groups is identified by Page as an example of redistributive discourse in pre-professional rugby union.

It was in the early 1990’s that a formal organization, Support Paraplegics in Rugby Enterprise - or SPIRE - emerged. Its RED-driven mission was to redistribute resources to those players who suffered several spinal injuries. Hopley spoke of the role SPIRE played in providing care for the rugby union community: “The only charitable programme that was set was 1991 or 1992, and that charity was called SPIRE, and that was all to do with spine injuries. That was the only provision of welfare” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012). Not only was it the sole welfare provider, but SPIRE’s reach was also limited. David Barnes

identified its narrow jurisdiction: “SPIRE was only for career ending injuries. It was very limited in what it could and could not do. In terms of player welfare, I don’t think there was anything there [welfare programmes]. I am certainly not aware of anything” (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012). The organization’s mission was limited to those who could access the organization’s help. Benevolent Fund Trustee Bill Page spoke of his perception that SPIRE was not an effective organization: “They were not actually that good at handing out a lot of what they had. They were sitting on huge assets but not necessarily spreading it around to people within the game that really needed it” (Page, Bill. Personal Interview. 29 September 2012). David Barnes also addressed the ineffectiveness of SPIRE in pre-professional days:

It [SPIRE] was sitting on huge amounts of money - 6-8 million pounds - but giving out less. It would only give out as much as the interest earned. So it was never really making any donations... people would apply, and just not get any money. It was an absolute disaster. They [SPIRE] were picking up a pound a ticket from every game across the road [referring to Twickenham Stadium]. So you are talking about hundreds of thousands a year going into it and not being spent. (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Once again we see an example of a RED model of vertical redistribution as defined by Esping-Anderson and Myles (2009). SPIRE, as an ad hoc community organization, collected resources for the purposes of redistributing them to a player who suffered a career ending injury. However, unlike the ad hoc community groups who used simple fundraising tactics to raise resources for a specific person because of a specific injury, SPIRE systematically raised money using an organised and strategic approach from which they built an endowment to

be used for no specific person or designated case. This allowed SPIRE to redistribute their collective resources when an injury occurred at any time. However, the narrow remit of the organization significantly limited the eligibility pool of those who could benefit from the organization's resources.

In sum, during the amateur days of rugby union, if a player would become injured he or she would typically rely on the services of the NHS. When career ending injuries did occur, ad hoc structures would emerge to address the immediate need for financial assistance. As identified in Chapter Two's 'quad-lemma', in the pre-professional era when an athlete was injured, the player would return to his or her non-playing career. In the professional era of rugby union, that was no longer an option. The need to address the career ending injury was not formally addressed until the creation of SPIRE, in 1991, four years before the transition to professionalism. However, the structure of the organization limited its caring capabilities. The transition from an amateur approach to a professional approach was not carried consistently across all facets of the game. Much of the professional structure still needed to be established. The lack of proper planning which affected the establishment of a professional structure negatively impacted the players since they were essentially professional athletes in an unprofessional sporting structure.

### 6.3 Rise of the Club Owner

Rugby union clubs that were once organised and operated by local committees started to be acquired by individual owners. The transition to professionalism created a reactionary environment, illustrated by the proverbial 'land grab' of rugby union clubs; during this time, individuals started to acquire the organizations for investment and commercial purposes. People such as Sir John Hall (Newcastle), Tom Walkinshaw (Gloucester), Andrew

Brownsword (Bath), Nigel Wray (Saracens) and Keith Barwell (Northampton) purchased clubs with the intent of creating a profitable sports product; however, the professional model of rugby union did not result in huge financial success. The financial strain placed pressure on many facets of the game. David Barnes spoke of this new culture of ownership:

You have a lot of wealthy people buying [rugby] clubs, which traditionally were just committee-run organizations. They bought the clubs - a lot of them thought they were going to make a lot of money. I think they all lost money. Newcastle being a prime case; Sir John Hall bought Newcastle rugby thinking it would be big - you know, huge crowds. You were getting reasonable crowds when it was amateur, so they thought professional you would get thousands and thousands. It has taken a lot longer to get there, and they did not really know what they were buying. (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Martyn Thomas, chairman of the RFU Management Board, spoke in a similar tone in a 2010 interview with Robert Kitson: “At the outset, the perception of owners like Sir John Hall and Nigel Wray was that they could transform the game through increasing the spectator base and the sponsorship. I think they would agree that hasn’t happened. I question whether, as currently structured, the game in this country is sustainable” (Kitson 2010).

The transition to a professional format placed unrealistic expectations on the new game, a point originally identified in Chapter Two. A memorandum prepared by the Rugby Union Players’ Association to the Parliament’s Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (RUPA 1999) identified several key issues that allowed for instability within the new structure of the professional game. First, the report indicated that the level of corporate sponsorship never occurred. The sponsors who did sign agreements withdrew their support

once the contractual obligations were satisfied and did not renew their sponsorship because of the weak financial conditions of the clubs. The clubs felt additional financial strain on account of the new owners fighting to acquire the best players by promising salaries that were unsustainable without large levels of corporate sponsorship and strong revenues through ticket sales. The rush to acquisition was such that proper business plans were not developed:

In some cases unrealistic business plans were put in place and in other situations hearts ruled heads totally. The club's administrators and officials simply did not have enough expertise to deal with and administer wage payrolls of between £1 million and £2 million pounds per year (RUPA; 1999: 2).

The RUPA report also identified a "lack of general planning from the onset of professionalism", which provided the potential for massive operational problems. The lack of operational structure bled into every facet of the game, including the employment rights of, and welfare provisions for, the new professional player. The lack of structure of the new professional game created a battlefield on which the new owners and the governing body of rugby union, the RFU, fought ferociously. The new structure of ownership and the resistance of the RFU to change produced a serious threat regarding the operational structure of the new professional game. Hopley articulated how the new group of owners entered an environment that was resistant to change:

You would have twelve people, ten people, at the time who own clubs [and] who all made lots of money doing their own thing, paddling their own canoe. On the back of that, they came into a heavily-regulated environment such as rugby, full of old farts,

of the duffers who are all very Victorian in their outlook. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

These clashing perspectives created constant struggle between the new guard of team ownership and the RFU who attempted to retain control over the domestic game. The 1999 Rugby Union Players' Association report made note of the power struggle between the two parties: "constant battle existed between the governing body and professional clubs regarding control over the players, organization and revenues" (RUPA 1999). The focus on power and revenue produced financial concerns that directly affected the players: "Many clubs are now facing financial hardship. Blackheath, England's oldest club has called in the receivers and then re-emerged under a different name leaving creditors, including players, thousands of pounds out of pocket" (RUPA 1999). The report identified how the poor planning directly affected the earning ability of the new professional player. Not only were players losing out on promised earnings, but their decision to enter the professional game also forced them to leave professional careers and sacrifice other personal opportunities:

Many players had good full time occupations outside of sport but were pushed by their clubs into becoming full time professionals. They were told that they needed to train every day or they would not be included in the team. Now many of those players are owed money by their clubs and have seen their initial annual earnings reduced. More worryingly young players were enticed into professional rugby at the expense of pursuing a trade or career or further education. (RUPA 1999)

In short, individuals were leaving their non-playing careers to become professional athletes; moreover, younger players were opting out of attending university to pursue a career in professional rugby union. In the attempt to win the 'arms race' of acquiring player talent,

the newly privately-owned clubs promised unrealistic and unsustainable salaries in the current economic climate. This raised the concern that those entering the arena of professional rugby union were passing into a setting that was ill-equipped and unprepared both financially and structurally to address the welfare of the professional player.

#### 6.4 Realities of Being a Professional Rugby Union Athlete in England

In 1995, rugby players were excited to be professional athletes who were paid to play. David Barnes reflected on those days as a new professional player and how, as the game matured, the glow of being a professional athlete began to fade:

The first few years we were just happy to get paid really. After a couple of years people started to realize - especially in the early years when the league was bigger, it was fourteen teams, they were still playing mid-week games - guys started to realize our bodies just cannot do this. But [the view of the owners] was very much, 'we own you; we can do what we want with you'. Players knew that we were not being that well looked after and medical standards were shocking. (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 June 2011)

The new structure was beginning to show cracks in the relations between the player and the team. Hopley stated that, "As the game began to mature it started to have significant HR [Human Resource] issues and contractual issues and fallout" (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Much of the 'fallout' was the result of inconsistent and non-standardised contracts for the players. Barnes elaborated on the contractual issues during the early years:

The contracts for players were massively different from club to club, and a key part of that was the injury clause. Clubs could sack you after 6 or 8 weeks after you were injured, which is not a long time in rugby union. Other clubs would have 20 or 26 weeks. So we worked with standardising contracts so everyone has the same contract now at whatever club you are at - and that took 9 years to get agreed. So it was something. All the players wanted representation. We had nothing in the early days, no legal advice. Again, rugby union was a new sport. The administrators tended to be ex-rugby union players who were given a job because they used to play rugby union, which meant they were not great administrators - which meant massive legal issues, massive employment issues and we had no one to represent the players.

(Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2012)

Benevolent Fund Trustee Mark Campion added to the conversation on establishing a uniformed contract as the first step in addressing the employment and welfare protection of the professional rugby union athlete. Like Barnes and Hopley, Campion identified the substantial differences in player contracts in the early days of professional rugby union, which also provided vastly different levels of care and protection;

So you could have professional rugby players in the Premiership on widely different employment contracts [and] on widely different amounts of medical support.

Treatment for injury management, playing conditions and employment conditions were widely varied. Like any young new industry, it did not have a trade union of representatives to try to get some type of collective base line of what the minimum should be. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)



Benevolent Fund Trustee Vic Luck identified the importance and need for fair contractual arrangements in this very physical sport, which was growing increasingly physical in the professional era. To protect the player, rules needed to be established operationally:

There is a natural danger that goes along with rugby, and in fact folks were getting injured out - once they are injured and no longer useful to the club, they were being thrown on the scrap heap. One of the injury and welfare related points in the contract was to build in a cushion period [so] that a player could not be thrown on the scrap heap unless you were injured for like 6 months, so you got that 26 week standard clause in there so you would have to be paid for that 26 weeks even if you had been injured. Of course, you would have to start thinking about what happens at the end of 26 weeks. Does anyone have any career provisions or something like that? What happens if your medical bills endure after the 26 weeks? So those were all related issues, but it was the standard contract stuff that kicked the rest along.

(Luck, Vic. Personal Interview. 3 October 2012)

Luck was not alone in identifying these concerns. In fact, these precise questions regarding welfare – or the lack thereof – for the professional rugby union athlete became part of a growing discourse, and soon player representation started to emerge. The following sections identify key moments in player representation and consider how those moments relate to RED, MUD and SID in professional rugby union in England.

### 6.5 Player Representation Starts to Emerge

The new structure of labour placed a disproportionate level of power and control into the hands of the new owners, which had adverse effects on the rights of the players.

Benevolent Fund Trustee Vic Luck claimed the following:

All of a sudden you have people taking it over [club ownership] who were entrepreneurs - self-made-men - probably very autocratic and used to getting their own way in business. Now you have some young rugby players coming around wanting a say. Essentially they [the new owners] are the boss and want to boss them [the players] around - and that would have characterized the early days. And I think that catalysed the idea of having representation of the player, to stop that bullying (Vic Luck. Personal Interview. 3 October 2012).

Barnes experienced the transition of labour as a player and supported Luck's claims: "There was no protection for any of us. No one really cared what players did or what happened to them. It was the case that the clubs had you as an asset and they would break you and kick you out; it became very obvious that we needed support" (David Barnes, Personal Interview 28 September 2011). This is not to contend that all clubs behaved the same way. Barnes did identify that certain clubs were better than others: "some would look after players, but you would hear about other clubs: wrong doctors, wrong physios, lack of medical care... and that became a huge issue" (David Barnes 28 September 2011). The concern grew as players started to see that the lack of care was becoming a professional hazard. Barnes noted: "people realized their career [was] being cut short. That's when it became much more of a driving force within the players' group" (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). The first attempt to create some protection was in the form of Rugby Union Players' Association.

Thus, months after the transition to a professional game, the newly-formed Rugby Union Players' Association became the first organization to attempt to represent the players. RUPA intended to represent all amateur and professional rugby union players in both England and Wales. Co-founded by employment attorney Richard Moon and former manager of the

British Lions, Robert Norster, RUPA was structured within the Sports Division of the Britain's General Union. This relationship would eventually result in the organization's demise.

Norster noted that the purpose of RUPA's formation was "to safeguard players' rights and to provide legal help for its members over such matters as contracts... We also arranged injury insurance, sickness payments, pensions and loss of earnings cover" (Ward 1999).

Norster pointed out in RED tones that they wanted to engage in redistributive services with the creation of pensions and programmes to protect loss of income. However, he also noted that the funding to provide such programmes was never properly acquired. RUPA's aspiration was "to provide the support for players in the same way as the Professional Footballers' Association does for footballers" (RUPA 1999), which was through a percentage of the television revenue.

While RUPA was working to establish themselves as the voice of the rugby union player, Damian Hopley, then-captain of the England 7's squad in Scotland, was injured. The injury to his knee was significant enough that it ended his career in the sport (Gribben 2009). Hopley was a textbook case for RUPA; however, he was unsure of RUPA's role and felt they could have done a better job. Speaking of RUPA, he said, "It is difficult not to be critical since we preceded them... I was never quite sure of their effectiveness. That is why I started [the RPA]. I did not think they [RUPA] were doing a good enough job" (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). In response to his disappointment with RUPA, Hopley created a rival organization: the Professional Rugby Players' Association. In 1999, Moon of RUPA and Hopley of PRA - along with representatives of the GMB - engaged in an initial discussion about combining forces so as to eliminate player confusion and the duplication of services. Moon explained:

I believe it is in the best interests of the rugby player to have one organization representing them. It was confusing to have two separate bodies and a merger was the best way forward (Ward 1999).

Despite the perceived advantages outlined by Moon, the GMB chose not to proceed with the merger talks. With the GMB unwilling to participate in further discussions, Richard Moon resigned from the Rugby Union Players Association<sup>27</sup>. Shortly after Moon's departure, the PRA became the driving force behind players' rights in English professional rugby. RUPA does not exist within the GMB portfolio nor does any organization by the name Rugby Union Players' Association exist in any registry as a trade union or not-for-profit organization in relation to rugby union in the United Kingdom.

This left the PRA as the only organization with the mission to represent the interests of professional players. The player lead charge was spearheaded by former London Wasp and England 7's captain, Damian Hopley. The next section will address how Hopley's injuries led him to see the importance of establishing an effective association that existed to support the welfare of professional rugby players.

#### 6.6 Injury of Damian Hopley

Three months into his career with the London Wasps, Damian Hopley's occupation as a professional sportsman ended while serving as the captain of the All England 7's squad. During a tournament in Scotland, Hopley suffered a serious knee injury. In the attempt to repair himself, Hopley went to the RFU for support and advice: "I was like, who should I go see? Do we have a specialist? Who is the knee guy? Who is the right guy to see?" (Hopley,

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<sup>27</sup> GMB was also unsupportive when a players' association was looking to establish with the code of Rugby League. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2012/jan/16/gmb-rugby-league-players-association>.

Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Information from the RFU was not quickly forthcoming, but eventually the RFU produced a recommended medical professional. The arthroscopy revealed that Hopley's anterior ligament in his right knee was partially torn and his lateral meniscus was ruptured, but he was told by the medical professional that he should be "ok". Hopley returned home and began five months of physiotherapy. Consequently, he lost out on a significant sum of his earnings in addition to paying for his own medical bills. Hopley looked once again to the RFU for advice, support and the possibility of some type of financial redistribution:

When I went to the RFU, I was like 'can you help? Here are my medical bills, plus I think I lost about £60,000', and they said 'No, you signed something on the bus on the way to the airport which absolutely indemnifies us. Yeah, you are on your own' (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

In short, the RFU stated that because Hopley signed a document acknowledging that his participation in rugby union was dangerous, they were not responsible for any unexpected expenses that might arise on account of Hopley's decision to participate. Basically, the RFU was telling Hopley that he knew the risks associated with playing rugby union at a professional level even to the point of signing a document stating he was aware of limited liability issues that he faced as a professional player while representing England. Similar to a pure MUD approach, which blames individual behaviour as the cause for exclusion, the RFU blamed Hopley for his injury, thus suggesting he was responsible for his recovery.

Hopley was shocked by RFU's response; he declared, "I am the captain of my country; how can I be abandoned like this? I had been dropped like a stone" (Hopley, Damian. Personal

Interview. 28 September 2011). Still determined to return to the game, Hopley completed his physiotherapy and made a full recovery.

In October of the same year Hopley received what he referred to as another “knock”. This time, the partially torn anterior cruciate ligament was completely ruptured, forcing Hopley back onto the injured list where he once again found himself “racking up significant medical bills and [facing] quite a big loss of income” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Over the following eighteen months, Hopley attempted to rehabilitate his knee. During this period he watched a documentary on the formation of the Ice Hockey Players’ Association which inspired Hopley to start a similar organization for professional rugby: “It was one of the many things that got me started thinking, why was there not an organization at the time in rugby that was effective?” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Although he was aware of RUPA’s existence, Hopley was unsure of their effectiveness since RUPA’s RED discourse was directly linked to a funding mechanism that had not been secured. Even though RUPA’s RED discourse existed in professional rugby union in England, it was ill-equipped to be more than just discourse. Further, it handed the players’ welfare interests over to the professional adverse RFU and the new supply-side stakeholders of club management.

In sum, during the formative years of the professional game, the discourse on players’ welfare was limited. From the statements made by Hopley, Barnes and members of the Board of Trustees, the new structure of rugby union failed to seriously consider the professional and personal welfare issues of the new professional rugby union athlete. Inconsistencies in contractual obligations, along with no formal process for addressing career ending injuries, increased the risk of “being thrown on the scrap heap” (Luck, Vic.

Personal Interview, 3 October 2011) or “dropped like a stone” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). This situation was not only a risk but an everyday reality. Hopley saw a need to establish effective representation that protected professional and personal welfare by standardising contracts and providing care for the professional player. The next section will identify how the RPA went from an idea into action and how it to promote a discourse about redistribution in situations of injury and hardship.

### 6.7 The March to Representation

Damian Hopley was the ‘Poster Boy’ of a promising career in professional rugby union whose vocation was cut prematurely short because of an injury. Frustrated by the lack of care and attention by the RFU, Hopley laboured to launch an organization that represented the professional and personal interests of professional rugby union players in England. He endeavoured to establish specialised structural mechanisms that protected the interests of the player both on and off the pitch. Having noted that rugby union had become a stand-alone career path and, as a career, the structures that existed in the amateur days no longer adequately provided the services the professional player required, Hopley was determined to address this deficit. With the establishment of professionalised player association, the RED discourse also became professionalised and more focused: “If it [rugby] is your full time job, you need specific insurances, welfare programmes, development programmes. I think the other group [RUPA] was set up in association with the GMB or the trade union association in the north of England. It was more of a general help piece and I did not think it was targeted enough for what we needed” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). Battered and bruised but not beaten, Hopley converted his foiling into action. Hopley specifically identified the lack of care performed by the RFU during his time

of need as the catalyst for establishing an organization that more effectively represented the welfare needs of the professional player:

I think I suffered the indignation of being injured on international duty as a captain of a country - and then to see the RFU's attitudes towards me when I asked for compensation and basically had to beg to get my medical bills paid. I was driven enough to do it, and I think I was respected enough by the players to do it. They were like, 'Do it and we will follow'. I was almost missionary in my zeal to get this done. I saw an opportunity for me personally, but also having gone through that whole piece of having to exit the game at such a young age with a pretty bright future ahead of me, it was a way of turning the bitterness around of what happened to me into something that was positive. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Hopley saw a need for a RED-style discourse to occur when players became injured as a result of their participation in the sport. As described in section 6.1 of this chapter, if a player was seriously injured in the pre-professional era, the local and/or regional clubs would come together in aid of an injured player. As the game transitioned into a professional format, Hopley saw the need to also professionalize the ad hoc welfare mechanisms and engage in a professionalised, RED-style conversation about providing welfare insurances for the new profession.

Hopley's reputation on the field and his personal connections with key players in clubs across the country allowed him the access - along with the gravitas - to make a case to support an organization that protected the professional and personal welfare of players. In August 1998 Hopley set out on his journey to establish just such a group: "So in August on



1998, without any funding, which I regret, I literally drove around the country... got in my car and spoke to all the players” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). David Barnes recalled how Hopley’s connection with key players in other clubs helped in the establishment of RPA:

The RPA grew because it was a bit more organised [than RUPA] and they [RPA] had key friends in the club. When I think back to the time when it all started up, I was down at Harlequins and Jason Leonard, who was a friend of Damian, who was a senior player and he was on board and he understood it... It was the senior players saying, ‘Look guys, we all had an option but we have to do this together’. So the senior players were absolutely key in just getting to a level for people to sign up... It was very much senior player driven... but you understood if you are going to change things you are going to have to do it together (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Hopley also spoke of how critical it was to have personal connections in the establishment of the association and in the process of gaining membership:

When you try to convince a sportsman to part with £10 never mind £110 - whatever the start-up membership was. The sort of influences those tipping point pieces, those guys in the dressing room, and rugby union like most team sports can be rather heard-like. So the followers follow the leader, and that was it. When you had [Lawrence] Dallaglio, [Martin] Johnson, [Jason] Leonard, you had key guys in key clubs who were friends and understood exactly what had happened to me but also saw the need to take something forward. I think that was critical (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

## 6.8 Foe to Friend

Not only was it critical to win the support of players, it was also critical to win the hearts and minds of those who opposed the creation of a players' association. Hopley spoke of the initial reaction of those in power when the players started to establish a unified front:

The RFU was terrified at the players getting their act together and coordinating. It [RFU's unwilling to work together] is still going on today. There is this amorphous body of men who had always had things their way and all of a sudden you have the players' front up and say, 'We don't think this is right, we don't think this is right. We want more accountability, some checks and balances of how you operate. We want to have full sight of your books'. It was unheard of in rugby. (Hopley, Damian.

Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Hopley also identified the concern that team owners and management had with the idea of a players association emerging in professional rugby:

You had some club owners who were used to dealing with the PFA [Professional Football Association] in football and were incredibly anti a collective players' organization or an organised player group. In football they have taken a percentage of the television rights as a collective bargaining position. From our point of view they [club owners] saw it as a huge threat. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

As mentioned above, RUPA had stated that it had planned to use a similar approach to the PFA and use a percentage of the television rights as their funding mechanism. However, Section 6.2 of this chapter identified that professional rugby union was not financially

stable; consequently, any additional revenue sharing of television rights was seen [by the club owners] as less revenue for the clubs. Barnes identified that the goal of the ownership was to keep cost to a minimum, and the players' association was – to them – just another expense: "Ownership saw it [players association] as a cost, and they do everything they can *not* to increase their cost base" (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Once again, a MUD approach emerged from the club ownership. As supply-side stakeholders, they were focused on keeping expenses to a minimum. If the club took over as the welfare provider of the player it would risk greater financial exposure. However, if the focus of care was placed on the individual behaviour of the players and not on the structure of game, the structure of the sport would not be responsible for the actions of the rogue players. As such, owners would not be required to provide care and increase the financial exposure of the clubs, who already had limited financial resources.

It was not until 2001, three years after the formation of the RPA, which the players' association and club ownership came to understand the benefit of collaboration. The Premier Rugby Partnership is a ten-year joint venture agreement that merged the financial interests of the club with the welfare interests of professional rugby union athletes. The goals of the joint venture were to create a more solvent financial environment for professional rugby union and to argue for greater compensation and acknowledgement of the talent of the player and investment of the club (BBC Sports Online, 2001). The specific aim of the venture was also to create a revenue-sharing scheme through the commercial management of the England International squad. The partnership was significant in that it addressed the welfare concerns of the athlete, including establishing a fixed playing schedule which consisted of a one game maximum per week and a direct line of representation for the player in the new professional game. This helped to protect athletes

beyond the scope of their sports careers. Damian Hopley was quoted in the press release announcing the joint venture of the new relationship: “This is a genuine and unique partnership between the player and the clubs. For the first time ever the player will have an active voice and genuine vote in the running of the game” (BBC Sports Online, 2001).

Moreover, the partnership was mutually beneficial for both the club and the player. The Chief Executive Officer of the Leicester Tigers, Tom Wheeler [1996-current], saw the partnership as a positive move in creating a stronger professional game. He was quoted in the same press release:

It is clear to us that we must find a lasting solution to the problems which have dogged us since the game became professional. This partnership with the players enables us to go to the RFU with a proposal for the future of the game, which with their approval will unite the whole of professional rugby union in England. This unique partnership will help provide the framework under their governance within which we can make Premier Rugby not only vibrant and exciting but also viable (BBC Sports Online 2001).

Hopley stated that mobilizing the shared interests of both parties was mutually beneficial: “The club owners realized that working with us [the RPA] and the players, they could have a significant positioning piece with the RFU... as a joint party we had a better position to negotiate with the RFU, who could not go anywhere else... It triggered a new pay deal for the All England team, funding for the RPA and triggered a new funding deal for the clubs as well” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012). Club owners recognized that it was time for the club and the player to collectively establish financial and operational stability for both parties. Tom Walkinshaw, an owner of Gloucester Rugby [1997-2010] who

was maligned by many at the RFU, was the visionary figure from the ownership side that identified that the clubs needed to work with the players. Walkinshaw was quoted in the joint venture press release: "... the time has come to recognize the professional club and the professional players have legitimate rights to manage the club game and to provide a stable playing and financial environment in which to work" (BBC Sports Online, 2001). Hopley spoke of the Walkinshaw overt support for the players, which Hopley acknowledged as critical to the success of the players' association: "He [Walkinshaw] was probably one of the guys at the beginning who would openly say why we needed to fund a players' association. I think he understood having an organised players' group was a very important component in any team sport" (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012). The importance was not just for the protection of the players on a team sport, as interpreted by Hopley. To have an organised players' group was also crucial to the owners, whose remit was to look after the professional and personal welfare of the player. By outsourcing this protection, the clubs themselves could escape the role of primary care provider; as such, they could reduce their own financial exposure, which was the owners' original goal. By joining forces, it also allowed the owners to restructure the financial arrangements with the RFU which, as Hopley identified earlier in this thesis, "triggered a new funding deal for the clubs as well" (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

The relationship forged with Walkinshaw transformed an elite public into a sympathetic partner. However, while club owners also grew to understand the value of a partnership with a players' organization, the RFU was not as open to the idea (and in fact continues to be resistant). Indeed, they harboured healthy levels of mistrust and suspicion. Hopley spoke of the misgivings which existed at the time: "There is always this innate paranoia that exists in most sports organizations and governing bodies, and I think everyone was terrified that

there was a hidden agenda that we [the players who were forming a players association] were trying to take over the game” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). However, Hopley contended that, to the contrary, the approach to a players’ organization was reasonable and fair and that supporters of the idea had a goal to establish a balance between work and protection. Barnes described the approach as “reasonable; we are not just less work, more money. It was a very sensible approach” (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

#### 6.9 Creation of the Benevolent Fund: RED

While the RPA was securing their operational role in the professional structure, the effects of the professional game was starting to take its toll. As identified in Chapter Two, the rate of injury severity increased in the post-professional structure of rugby union, which consequently placed a greater importance on the need to address the impact of career ending injuries. Hopley argued that it was not until the injury of Andy Blyth, a former England international who was severely injured while playing for the Sales Sharks in 2000, that the RPA recognized the need for an additional level of RED-like redistribution: “Andy Blyth suffered a serious spinal injury, and that was the trigger that we actually needed to start physically donating and generating revenue on behalf of the players that were injured... It [Blyth’s accident] was absolutely a specific incident where everyone one was like ‘oh my god’ - this was now real, this is happening” (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

Prior to Blyth’s accident, the RPA had promoted the professional and personal welfare of the athlete by standardising contractual obligations, maximising the amount of time a player

was allowed to recover from injury, limiting the amount of competition time during the week and establishing injury insurance protection. It was not until Blyth's injury that a serious weakness was exposed in the welfare provisions of the newly-established players' association: the ability to address the immediate needs of a traumatic injury. Barnes identified how Blyth's injury exposed the structure's vulnerability:

At the time there was nothing, there was literally nothing. You had a bit of monetary support which all players have, but it became obvious that there was nothing there at all. No one really knew what to do. No one had really thought about a career ending injury in rugby union. So when it happened, it took everyone by surprise. And then that [the Blyth accident] was the trigger to start raising some money for those who were severely injured (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011).

In response to the Association's inability to provide redistributive welfare and help financially in Blyth's recovery, the RPA established the Benevolent Fund<sup>28</sup> in 2001. The first three remits of the organization, as stated in its mission, is to: "provide financial assistance and practical support to current and former professional players in the following ways: Emergency Relief for sudden career ending or life changing injury, Help with the cost of on-going medical treatment as a result of long-term illness or injury and financial hardship if unable to work as a result of illness or injury" (RPA Website<sup>29</sup>).

By creating such an organization, the RPA began direct and active participation using a RED-influenced approach. They provided emergency funding in career ending and crisis situations, paid medical bills - including long-term care - and provided resources to players

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<sup>28</sup> RPA Benevolent Fund renamed itself 'Restart' in October of 2012

<sup>29</sup> Available From: <http://therpa.co.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/player-development-programme>. [Accessed March 15, 2010].

who were unable to work are examples of classical redistributive welfare. The funds that are raised through the contributions of corporations, rugby union supporters and the players are reallocated back to players who are in need. Esping-Anderson and Myles (2009) identify this vertical model of redistribution as a 'Robin Hood' approach: taking from the rich to give to the poor. However, in the case of non-profit redistribution, the resources are not taxed; instead, they are donated. As such, in these cases it is not so much *taking*. It is more of a case of willingly giving to those in need (Hills 2011).

Trustee Luck identified that the Benevolent Fund was not a part of a strategic plan of growth for the organization but rather a component of the overall ethos to take care of the player:

"So I think it came out sort of accidentally on a broad thrust that we were going to look after the players. So it was definitely not part of a corporate plan in 1998 that said in four years' time we are going to have benevolent fund" (Luck, Vic. Personal Interview, 3 October 2011).

The injury to Hopley followed by the injury to Blyth illustrated the failure of the current welfare provisions, which caused the RPA to create the Benevolent Fund in 2001 and to ensure that it played a redistributive role.

The Benevolent Fund began participating in the RED model by collecting funds through RPA memberships, contributions from private and corporate donors and revenue generated by special events (e.g. the RPA Annual Dinner). These resources are pooled and then redistributed to those who are in need of assistance during times of injury or hardship.

Trustee Campion explained how the foundation participates in a RED context:

A good example would be paying the taxi fare for the immediate family to visit to their injured son in hospital who was injured for a 6-week period. For them to get that money to make that trip was very difficult. It was just another problem on the



long list of much bigger problems that we were able to take off the problem list very quickly without going through a lot of red tape. Even though it was not a big amount of money, we are able to react quickly with high impact. We were a hassle factor remover by doing that (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

The RED approach can also be seen in the foundation's treatment of former rugby player Scott Hobson, who sustained a severe shoulder injury during a pre-season friendly against Aix-en-Provence in 2010. The Foundation provided Hobson with a car with an automatic transmission, allowing him to travel to his rehabilitation treatments. Nerve damage to his shoulder had rendered him incapable of shifting a standard gearbox.

Another classic example of the foundation's participation in a redistributive discourse is the case of Alastair Hignell, a former English rugby union international who is living with multiple sclerosis. The Foundation has provided financial assistance for his ongoing treatment and physiotherapy. The examples provided above illustrate the foundation's participation in a RED discourse by reallocating collective resources to assist in the care of those who are injured and/or ill. The RPA was the main voice in promoting the welfare rights of athletes. The RFU, by contrast, did not enter the conversation about athlete welfare until the injury of Matt Hampson.

On 15 March 2005 Matt Hampson, a prop for England, suffered a career ending injury that rendered him a quadriplegic<sup>30</sup> while playing for the England Under-21 squad. The structural protection that the RPA were able to put in place provided Hampson with greater financial safeguards than were available to Hopley at the time of his injury. Hampson's injury and the

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<sup>30</sup> Llewellyn, David (18 March 2005). "Hampson remains 'critical' after surgery". The Independent. <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/rugby/rugby-union/hampson-remains-critical-after-surgery-528907.html>. [Accessed 20, 7, 2009].

treatment that he received from the RFU reminded Hopley of the challenges he had faced with the RFU in earlier days:

Matt Hampson was an enormous challenge; it was the first true catastrophic accident. Andy Blyth had a catastrophic injury and recovered. Matt was never going to recover from it, and Matt will have a shortened life due to his condition. I think the RFU acted appallingly. It really re-engaged me back to when I was injured on a much smaller scale, but the abdication of responsibility [of the RFU], and they just washed their hands of Matt. (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Hopley continued to expound on his views of the RFU and their lack of welfare and/or compassion relating to the Hampson injury:

They could not have played it worse if they tried. The chief exec of the RFU never ever visited or called or spoke to Matt Hampson who was an all-England Under-20's player.<sup>31</sup> Spinal dislocation cannot breathe without a ventilator. It was just gross misconduct as I saw it. That was frustrating for us. We were able to provide some help. It was a very, very tough time for everyone in the game. The Leicester Tigers were fantastic with him. We did what we could. You know, just trying to help.

(Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

The structural changes encouraged by the RPA provided Hampson with a cash pay-out of £500,000 through the Player Accident Policy and an additional £625,000 through the Professional Players Policy, totalling £1.125 paid to him by insurers. The development of

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<sup>31</sup> Matt Hampson's biography contends that one visit did occur between RFU CEO Martyn Thomas and Matt Hampson on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2005 after a series of letter between Hampson family attorneys and the legal counsel of the RFU.

incorporating insurance policies points to the growing role of a redistributive discourse on addressing welfare in the professional game, as insurance is the equitable allocation from one entity to another. This process is similar to the vertical and horizontal redistribution models presented by Esping-Anderson and Mills (2001). Insurance participates in the redistributive discourse in the sense that one pays into a pool with other at-risk individuals with the knowledge that if one experiences hardship or illness, resources from the pool will be distributed to that individual during that period. It can be argued that insurance is the commercial enterprise of redistributive welfare (Gollier, 2003).

Hampson himself expressed that his reaction from the RFU was similar to Hopley's. When Hampson sustained his injury, the RFU "wanted to brush me under the carpet." Hampson continued, "I am an inconvenience. They don't want me to be a figurehead and talk about spinal injuries in rugby union because they are afraid people will be turned off the game." Hampson, who coaches at Oakham school, further remarked that, "with the kids I meet, I find it has the opposite effect [kids are not turned off from rugby] (Grice 2011).

After Hampson's injury, the RFU performed a complete review of their injury policy. Consequently, they produced the 'New Vision' policy to address career ending injuries. The policy created a new framework for redistributive benefits. It included a support package of £2,000 - £500,000 in care and benefits from day one of the injury, with the option to increase the benefit payment to £1 million if the injury resulted in paralysis (Grice 2011)

On 21 October 2001, RFU Chairman, Martyn Thomas, made a statement in *The Telegraph* about the 'New Vision' policy:

There is now a lot of medical opinion suggesting that although money is important, so too is the nature of support for the individual... It's about getting them to accept

the reality of the situation and to develop a life within the evident restrictions so that they can have some sort of meaningful existence. We've spent 18 months to two years trying to formulate our new approach. The whole thing needs constant review and evolution (Cleary 2008).

Thomas's statement acknowledges the prevailing RED influences practices which existed in rugby union. His proclamation can be interpreted as an attempt to change the dominant framework from RED to MUD, which places significant emphasis on personal behaviour. Thomas's focus is on the athlete's responsibility to accept that his life has changed. From a MUD perspective, the act of giving direct financial assistance is a mechanism which prohibits the athlete from accepting the reality of the situation and impedes him from moving past the injury, thus not developing a meaningful existence. Thomas is arguing that the injured player needs to adopt a new behaviour in which he accepts his new limitations and focuses on establishing a high quality of life.

Thomas's argument must be called into question when it is held up against Hampson's injury. On 20 July 2005 - almost three months before the announcement of the RFU's 'New Vision' plan - Nathan Martin, Head of Performance Services for the RFU, contacted the Hampson family. He announced the RFU's sympathy and informed the family that the RFU medical rehabilitation budget would cover Hampson's day-to-day care whilst he was at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Three months later, on 14 October 2005, seven days before Thomas announced the 'New Vision' plan, Nathan Martin contacted the Hampson family again, this time to inform them that RFU's funding for Hampson's recovery would end either on 20 January 2006 or at his discharge from the Stoke Mandeville Hospital - whichever occurred first (Kimmage 2011). Along with cutting the funding, the lines of communication between

the RFU and the Hampson family were also affected. Hampson's biographer identifies missing e-mails, the RFU ignoring correspondence and confidential medical reports sent to wrong addresses by the RFU. A letter to Nathan Martin from Anne Hampson, Matt's mother, on 22 November 2005 stated the following:

We are saddened and frankly shocked by the treatment and lack of warmth [from the RFU]. At our last conversation three weeks ago you said mistakes have been made and lessons have been learned so I was disappointed to have another terse email from yourself... we know in 135 years nobody has ever received such a serious injury at an elite level. We feel your board are currently in denial. Matt should be treated with the respect he deserves as an England player. You owe it to Matt and the rest of the rugby union community to show you do care for one of your boys. We do not want confrontation, we simply want you to help and support our son and make him feel valued by all of you at the RFU. (Kimmage; 2001: 290-291)

After several turbulent e-mails between RFU representatives and the Hampson family, RFU Chairman Martyn Thomas finally intervened and visited Matt Hampson on 27 November 2005. In an e-mail from Thomas to Anne Hampson dated the 30 November, Thomas confirms that the RFU "will maintain the costs of Matt's personal carer, Glen, on the same terms as at present for a period of 6 months from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January or until Matt is discharged from Stoke Mandeville Hospital, whichever is the earlier" (Kimmage; 2001; 296-297).

What is worthy of note here is that at the precise time that the RFU was developing and introducing their 'New Vision' plan that, according to Thomas, was about the "support for

the individual”, the RFU lacked both a RED and SID discourse. This shortcoming was illustrated by the RFU’s cutting direct funding to Hampson. It was additionally exemplified in their lack of the kind of investment in Hampson that would allow him the ‘meaningful existence’ their New Vision rhetoric promised.

Even while the RFU’s discourse and actions were demonstrating a deliberate withdrawal from player support, the RPA was expanding their discourse and incorporating SID into their current RED, as the next section will demonstrate.

#### 6.10 RPA Benevolent Fund: SID

Trustee Campion identifies the dual discourse about the RPA Benevolent Fund, serving in both a redistributive (RED) and social investment (SID) capacity welfare:

The Benevolent Fund is also about providing education and trying to beat the drum of education. We [Benevolent Fund] sponsor a lot of people doing training courses. A lot of people apply. We have an annual system of applying for grants for education, and I think it is a great use of the Benevolent Fund, building that bridge for employability post-career and the emergency fund for seriously injured people who need help very quickly in difficult circumstances. Where they might be confused or embarrassed or not know what to do when they are in a difficult situation very quickly, the trust of their teammates, the playing community is very high, there for access to the RPA Benevolent fund should be very easy. That is not the same as dealing with a life insurance company that have no relationship [with the player] and it is the beginning of a long winded difficult process. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

As the Foundation matured, it was able to adapt to concerns as they arose from the new structure of professional rugby union (e.g. the 'quad-lemma'). From the Trustees' perspective, the RED discourse of redistributing resources to those who needed care during times of illness, injury and hardship was no longer going to be the only dialogue in which the Foundation needed to participate. Trustee Campion identified how the Foundation incorporated a SID discourse into the existing RED:

The early days of the RPA were more about the fundamentals of putting in place the framework, a basic framework for the employment of professional rugby union players. I think the emphasis has moved through to recognition that the average working life span will not create independent finance for them [the players] to retire on, and there is a real need to have an education programme - and this is where we started to move the Benevolent Fund. They will be better people for keeping contact with potential employment opportunities. But also will come the day they finish rugby union be it through injury or natural retirement. They will need to have carried on some training and come out with some useful employment qualifications or access that they would not have done if they just stayed in their rugby [union] club environment. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

The need to transition to a SID model is because of factors like the 'quad-lemma', as established in Chapter Two. The Foundation decided to incorporate a SID approach into the welfare discussion to prevent athletes who may be at risk of becoming socially excluded, but it was also necessary for the financial survival of the Foundation. Trustee Campion explained that the professional rugby union career is not lucrative enough to allow for retirement post playing career and that a majority of players will require an additional career once they

retire from playing professional sports. Acquiring a career after professional sports without a skill other than rugby union will make securing a career extremely difficult:

There is a financial hole; they cannot earn enough money as a professional player.

They will have to get a job no matter what they do to sustain a living, and that process is going to be difficult... someone has to be there to help them make that bridge or in fact catch them in a real emergency-type situation which occurs. And with the level of greater fitness and greater collisions, this will only increase

(Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011).

Campion further argued that the increase of reported injury along with the increase of players forced to retire because of injury in the new professional game could translate into an increase in need for assistance and care:

We saw some of the predictive injury rates done by the actuaries from the big insurance companies. We noticed with the advent of professionalism the retirement rate and increased fitness contact, injury rate would take its toll in a number of years... we tried to move the Benevolent Fund not just to cover emergency situations but on the basis that there would be so many people having to retire based on the actuary forecast they would absolutely need as much help getting into careers as possible. (Campion, Mark. Personal Interview. 3 October 2011)

The move to a SID approach was critical for both the player and the Foundation. In terms of the player, providing the athlete with the ability to acquire paid work is a cornerstone solution for reducing social exclusion, as presented by Levitas (2005, 2004, and 1996). If the actuaries are correct and the rate of injury-induced retirement increases, the more ex-players who can secure employment and not rely on the limited resources of the Foundation only helps to ensure that the Foundation is not stretched beyond their financial



capabilities and can continue to participate in addressing the welfare concerns of the professional rugby union athlete.

Campion's quote (above) echoed the exact ethos of Levitas's SID discourse. The Foundation directly engages in the SID rhetoric of promoting employment as an approach to decrease the risk of exclusion of the ex-professional player. The more quickly a former player can transition into another form of employment, the less the risk of exclusion and the need for assistance from the Foundation. This can be seen in the following five examples.

The first example is the case of Robert Todd. Todd, a former centre for the Sale Sharks, was diagnosed with a serious case of skin cancer. As a result of his diagnosis, Todd was forced to retire from the game immediately. Todd received direct financial assistance from the Benevolent Fund to help with his medical expenses, an assistance which falls in line with a RED discourse. However, the care did not end with paying for medical care. The Benevolent Fund participated in a SID approach when the Foundation purchased equipment as part of his retraining to become a qualified chiropractor. The Foundation's assistance with Todd's education and equipment purchase to start his career as a chiropractor provided him with the means to avoid exclusion.

A second example can be found in the case of Leicester Tiger's Martin Castrogiovanni, who opened up a restaurant with the help of business relations forged by the Players'

Association (PlayersRoom 2011a Issue 4 p 4). A third SID case example can be seen in former professional rugby union player Andy Buist who experienced a career ending knee injury at the age of 24. Buist accepted his doctor's recommendation to retire from the sport after his third knee operation. With the help of the Players' Association, Buist got some exposure to large media corporations, allowing him to open his own photography business (PlayersRoom 2011b issue 5 p24).

A fourth example of the RPA's engagement with a SID approach and which highlights the Foundation's emphasis on educational development can be seen in Richard Haughton. Haughton is studying accountancy with the help of the Benevolent Fund. His interest in developing his educational skills was driven by the knowledge that his career in professional rugby union will eventually come to an end. Haughton stated in a Players' Room interview, "As you start to get older you begin to think about what you are going to do when you finish and how to prepare for that situation" (The PlayersRoom 2011c Issue 6 p13).

Alex Tait serves as the fifth example of how the RPA encourages players to actively use their time to gain qualifications for a life after professional sport. Tait is reading for a degree in chemistry. Tait also spoke of his brother Matthew who was injured while playing rugby:

He's been out for over a year, so he's had a lot of time on his hands, but he's made good use of it, he completed his pilot's license not so long ago and I think he's looking to move into that once he's finished playing.<sup>32</sup>

All of the above examples provide evidence of the dominant SID language of the Benevolent Fund and how the use of that dominant language has modified the behaviour of the playing community. The language of the playing community will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter. This chapter's focus has been centred on identifying the RED and SID discourses used by the Board of Trustees in addressing player welfare in professional rugby union.

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<sup>32</sup> Available From: <http://therpa.co.uk/the-appliance-of-science/>

### 6.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the language used by the Benevolent Fund's Board of Trustees in an effort to establish the dominant language used by the individuals who are driving the discussion of welfare provisions in English professional rugby union. By establishing this dominant discourse the chapter provided two main arguments.

First, it highlighted that the motivations for the creation of the Benevolent Fund came from a recognition of the lack of welfare mechanisms available to players during the advent of professional rugby union in England. Second, using the lenses established by Levitas and analysing the statements of the Board of Trustees - many of whom were also founding members of the Benevolent Fund - this chapter identified how the organization's dominant participation in player welfare evolved. It noted the organization's roots in establishing consistency in the professional players' contracts and its growth into a redistribution-based approach to support that provides mechanisms for addressing the symptoms of potential exclusion. From there, the organization transitioned into its current discourse on player welfare by providing athletes with the means to reduce social exclusion.

By applying Levitas's filters to the Trustees' statements, it is possible to analyse the levels of care - and complexities of providing it - to professional rugby union athletes. The fact that the trustees spoke in terms of both RED and SID shows the multi-prong approach required to address welfare for both short-term and career ending injuries. What I found surprising was the Foundation's dominant emphasis on providing opportunities for players to develop the means to prevent social exclusion from occurring. Barnes provided a capstone statement which identified the arch of language used by the Trustees to define the role of athlete welfare:

Welfare for me is injury prevention, injury care both in the short and long-term care. So immediate care as well continued care, welfare is the day to day of how a club looks out for the player. As we evolve, the welfare takes a broader approach - setting up personal development, taking care of the educational development, vocational development, which is running up alongside after your playing career. (Barnes, David. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011)

Barnes's statement aptly addresses the purpose of this chapter. In it, he identified the motivations for the creation of the Association as a body providing mechanisms of care to professional rugby union athletes. When the game of rugby union transitioned to a professional sport, there was an absence of devices for addressing care in the professional format. The RPA and RPA Benevolent Fund was created to fill that void. Barnes's quote also identified the spectrum of discourses engaged in by the Trustees of the Benevolent Fund. This chapter highlighted both the RED and SID statements made by those who have the responsibility of creating policies designed to protect professional rugby union athletes. The fact that the Trustees spoke in terms of both RED and SID shows the need to include multiple methods for providing proper protection.

As Barnes stated, RED dominated the approach of the Benevolent Fund but as the game evolved, SID started to grow as a policy approach and eventually came to dominate the tone of the language used by the board of Trustees. However, this dominant tone only represents half of the picture on player welfare in professional rugby union. In order to explore and arrive at a full understanding of athlete welfare, this thesis now turns its focus to the language used by the players and interrogates their understanding of player welfare in professional rugby union.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **Players' Discourses: Retirement, Welfare and 'Life After Rugby'**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

It would be irresponsible to try to understand issues connected to welfare provision for professional rugby union players and how they prepare for athletic retirement without talking to the players themselves. Therefore, in this chapter I draw upon qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with a sample of 24 professional rugby union players, each at varying stages of their athletic careers. All 24 are part of a squad of players that are currently in the sport's elite 'Aviva Premiership'. From the retrieved data in this chapter, I present two main arguments. First, early career professional rugby union players (usually those within their first or second year of a professional contract) tend to show less concern about their post-athletic career retirement plans and, consequently, have not properly prepared for it. Second, over the course of a player's career, his views towards welfare and plans towards retirement often change, with older players being more likely to prepare for their athletic retirement. Building on these arguments, I suggest that - given the opportunity and relevant mechanisms - rugby union players will prepare for a transition to a second career.

To establish these arguments, I will continue to employ the discourse models that Levitas devised (described in Chapter Three) as analytical tools for understanding the ways in which players talk about these issues.

## 7.2 Shared Experience and the Dominant Discourse within the Playing Community

The first level of analysis I undertook to assess the players' discourse involved aggregating the language that the 24 players used to discuss issues of welfare and retirement. This was undertaken in order to identify the 'dominant discourses' that were used across the sample. The categories from this analysis were largely drawn from Levitas's work (Levitas, 2004 1996a, 1996b) as outlined in Chapter Three. While I predominantly draw on RED, SID and MUD discourses, I add a fourth category: 'non-engaged discourse' (hereon referred to as NED). NED does not refer to a language which fails to show an engagement with any issues; instead, it represents those discourses in which a rugby union player does not appear to show a concern for post-athletic retirement plans.<sup>33</sup> In the abstract sense, an example of this might be when an individual is aware of a potential negative outcome but, rather than preparing a contingency plan, the individual waits until the negative action occurs before addressing the situation.

NED can be understood more concretely, however. Consider the example of players who are well of aware of the risk of injury related to rugby union yet choose not to prepare for their inevitable retirement or make arrangements related to the risk of injury-induced involuntary retirement. An example of NED discourse was provided by Player Three. When asked about his preparation for the possibility of an injury-induced retirement, he simply replied that he "...could not be bothered. I know injury happens... but I'm young...I will have time to address

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<sup>33</sup> The NED is not declaring an absolute absence of the player discourse on his own welfare. Indeed, NED should not be mistaken for a situation in which the athlete is unaware of or naïve about the reality that a career in professional sport is short and/or that injury can hasten retirement in professional sport. The comments made by players which I am classifying as 'non-engagement' statements do express awareness of the risk of injury and the possible long-term impacts injury may have on their careers. Yet even equipped with this knowledge, the athletes spoke with an accepted disregard for both the idea of actively preparing for life after rugby and what types of protection are available to them.

that later. Now I just want to get on with me rugby” (Player Three. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012). Player Three’s remark was representative of the players’ most commonly used discourse – which I thus refer to as the ‘dominant discourse’ (borrowing from Touraine’s 2009 ‘Dominant Interpretative Discourse’). From the data gathered from the interviews, Table 7.1 expresses the dominate understanding of welfare.

Table 7.1 Players’ Understanding of Welfare

	RED	MUD	SID	NED
Players’ understanding of general welfare	59%	0%	41%	0%
Players’ understanding of player welfare	33%	0%	51%	14.51%

The results show that a majority of players speak about welfare in general using a RED discourse; however, when asked specifically about player welfare there was a switch in the dominant tone of the language to SID-informed discourse. Additionally, a new set of comments emerged within player welfare language, which is being referred to as NED in this thesis. None of the players’ comments fell within the MUD discursive strategy.

The RED approach could be interpreted as a way of reducing the players’ symptoms of social exclusion by providing those players who are in need with resources to help them avoid this ostracism. The RED methodology was consistent with other players’ comments

regarding the welfare mechanisms contained within the contractual obligations of their professional contract.

By comparison, the SID approach is more focused on providing means for reducing social exclusion. The participating players had a well-developed understanding of the need to have the means to acquire employment once their career as a professional athlete was over. Typical examples of those means included education and trade development. A common feature amongst those players who used RED and SID discursive methodologies related to their thoughts about experiencing injury either through personal involvement and/or seeing injury occur to friends and teammates. These commonly-shared experiences are noteworthy. Their familiarities with injury and career ending injury both encouraged them to understand their protection under their contract and fostered their desire to see the development of a legitimate place that would provide financial support once their career has come to a close.

The results from these interviews are not all that surprising. For example, it was not astonishing to discover that the players did not use the MUD model. I would have been surprised if the players had blamed themselves for their own possible exclusion because of their personal choice to become a professional rugby player.

Additionally, the existence of a RED approach to the subject is not a surprising discovery. The United Kingdom has a tradition of providing redistributive care for their citizens. The existence of the National Health Service (NHS) is a good example of how mechanisms of care in times of need are available to all. In a climate of socialised care, residents have certain levels of expectation. A survey conducted by the RPA found that 81% of those surveyed believed there should be some sort of medical support structure for retired



professionals (Hopley, Damian. Personal Interview. 28 September 2011). It would have been much more surprising, then, if the players had not spoken in terms of resource redistribution, as it is the current standard practice of care in the United Kingdom.

What was surprising was the dominant SID language the players expressed. I was anticipating the dominant language of the participating athletes to be RED with a high level of reliance on the contractual obligations provided to them by their club. However, the high level of SID language suggests the nuanced understanding of player welfare. It also points to a greater desire on the part of the players to be active participants in their retirement than is suggested in the literature which was reviewed for the preparation of this research (Cecic-Erpic, Wylleman and Zupancic 2004; Anderson & Morris 2000, Webb et al. 1998).

The data both confirms existing facts as well as suggests a transition in how athletes understand player welfare and how they prepare for a life after sport. The existence of NED statements supports the already-known position that some athletes do not properly prepare for post-sport life. However, the data also show an increasing level of retirement awareness and an active participation in retirement preparation.

### 7. 3 Players' Changing Discourses Over the Course of Their Athletic Career

The data from the previous section does not show how players' views might change over the course of their athletic career. As a second form of analysis, and to better enable discussion of this issue, the aggregated data presented in Table 7.1 was disaggregated to show players' views according to the length of time that they had played rugby union professionally. To perform this analysis, the SID, RED, MUD and NED categories were retained, and the results are presented in Table 7.2

Table 7.2 Years Employed on a Professional Contract, in Relation to Players' Dominant Discourses

Years Played	Pseudonym	Dominant Discourse
1	Player 1	Non-Engagement Discourse
1	Player 2	Non-Engagement Discourse
1	Player 3	Non-Engagement Discourse
1	Player 4	Redistribution Discourse
1	Player 5	Redistribution Discourse
1	Player 6	Redistribution Discourse
1	Player 7	Non-Engagement Discourse
1	Player 8	Redistribution Discourse
1	Player 9	Non-Engagement Discourse
1	Player 10	Non-Engagement Discourse
2	Player 11	Non-Engagement Discourse
2	Player 12	Redistribution Discourse
4	Player 13	Social Integration Discourse
4	Player 14	Social Integration Discourse
4	Player 15	Social Integration Discourse

5	Player 16	Social Integration Discourse
5	Player 17	Social Integration Discourse
5	Player 18	Social Integration Discourse
5	Player 19	Social Integration Discourse
6	Player 20	Social Integration Discourse
6	Player 21	Social Integration Discourse
6	Player 22	Social Integration Discourse
8	Player 23	Social Integration Discourse
9	Player 24	Social Integration Discourse

Table 7.2 shows the dominant discourses of the twenty-four players who participated in the research along with the number of years that player has participated in rugby at the professional level. As Table 7.2 demonstrates, there is a clear relationship between the years played and the dominant discourse the player used to describe his understanding of welfare. NED discourses appeared exclusively among the players who are in the first two years of their professional career and did not appear among the statements of those who have been playing in the professional ranks for at least four years. It should be noted that all the research participants spoke in RED and SID terms, but Table 7.2 represents the dominant discourse expressed by a player in relation to the number of seasons he has played professional rugby.

#### 7.4 RED: Players Welfare and Post-Athletic Retirement Plans

It is important to note that not all early career players spoke about player welfare in predominantly NED terms. For instance, five first- or second-year professional rugby union players from my sample of twelve early career players used RED discursive strategies when engaging with such issues. Indeed, when the players were asked about addressing welfare issues relating to long-term medical and/or short-term medical care, a very traditional redistributive welfare language appeared in their discourse. A common thread that runs throughout the comments offered by the sample that can be classified as RED-inspired discourse is the agreement that direct medical care should be provided to the athlete through a redistribution of resources; the players spoke of short-term medical care and long-term medical care as the result of a catastrophic injury in terms of contractual obligations. For example, Player Thirteen stated that: “As long as I am under contract and the injury occurred from me playing, yeah I think it is the responsibility that is owed to me. It’s in the [professional player employment] contract” (Player Thirteen. Personal Interview. 2 May 2012). However, those RED descriptions of care were coded to show that a slight majority (52 per cent) referred to care for long-term injuries while the remainder (48 per cent) focused on short-term injury recovery.

It is worth stating that dealing with the issue of long-term care as a result of injury is not a well-tested area for the professional clubs or the RPA. However, as established in Chapter Two, since the game transitioned to a professional format, there has been an increase in injury. While it may not continue to increase, the fact still remains that injuries – and thus the risk for serious injury – are greater within the professional game. Player Sixteen, a player in his fifth year, commented on this:

When dealing with the day-to-day stuff like short-term injuries, the club does a good job, but if it was something major I am not sure how well the club would be able to handle that type of thing. In that case it would be good to have an external group, I mean... I think... well I know my club has very little experience of dealing with career ending injury. We have had three in our history, but look at the global game. There still only a handful of players [...] I think it is a good thing that people know they are being looked after, but at the same time a lot of it is down to you are paid to do a job and you are not producing week in and week out. It puts a lot of stress and places players under pressure both physically and mentally. (Player Sixteen. Personal Interview. 16 May 2013)

#### 7.5 SID: Players' Welfare and Post-Athletic Retirement Plans

It is interesting to note that all twelve players who had been professional rugby union players for at least four seasons spoke about athletic retirement and player welfare issues using predominantly the SID model. For instance, those players I interviewed identified the need to address retirement because, "The biggest concern is the uncertainty that goes with this kind of job. [You] never know when it is going to end" (Player Twenty. Personal Interview. 16 May 2012). Indeed, a consistent feature that unites the senior players' comments is the understanding that their career is short and can end quickly as a result of injury. As such, Player Fifteen, who in the fourth year of his professional playing career, expressed the need to have a post-career plan in place:

It [professional rugby union] is a very short career. Even if you make the most of it, you will be done by the time you are thirty-five max. Others will be two or three years in and then find themselves out of contract. It forces people to go down a

path. You get all this encouragement and suddenly you don't have a job and they don't have a rugby career. (Player Fifteen. Personal Interview. 15 June 2012)

To help address the inevitable uncertainties related to a short career, it is important to create as much employment opportunity for the athlete and to establish a 'fall-back' plan. In this study, the more experienced players' spoke of the need to develop skills outside rugby to allow for employment opportunities once rugby is done. Player Twenty-Three, in his eighth year as a professional player and the most senior player who took part in the research, spoke in clear SID terms when he stated:

I came straight into rugby from school and had little experience in the real world. At the end of the day I am a professional rugby player, but I need to maximise my options away from rugby. (Player Twenty-Three. Personal Interview. 17 April 2012)

Similarly, Player Twenty, an athlete who has been on a professional contract for six seasons, said that maturity starts to help players think more carefully about welfare: "As you start to get older you begin to think about what you're going to do when you finish and how to prepare for that situation" (Player Twenty. Personal Interview. 16 May 2012). The same player similarly contended that as the player matures, his concerns are no longer reserved to strictly performance but are diversified to include a wider variety of issues. SID discourse highly values 'fall-back plans' since they help to increase the likelihood of acquiring employment once the primary career has expired.

The tone and nature of Player Twenty's statements resonated with statements made by other players who have been involved in professional rugby for more than four years. For example, Player Seventeen, who is in his fifth season as a professional rugby union player,

expressed similar sentiments. He acknowledged how easy it is for the younger rugby union players to occupy their time with other distractions, which he did himself when he was a younger man. His comments sounded a warning to the younger players whose discourse in NED-driven and who do not work on developing skills outside of rugby:

I don't want to be seen to be preaching, [but] it is so important for younger guys to get some work experience. It is very easy - and I am guilty of this - of just chilling out, drinking coffee all day at Starbucks, but I wish I had spent less time there and more time in the local office learning a trade - even though I wouldn't have really enjoyed it. It is really difficult in the current climate to get a job, so it's all about networking.

(Player Seventeen. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012)

The way in which players spoke about future career plans came in two different ways: first, through developing (non-athletic) work-based opportunities and second, by increasing opportunities to continue in formal academic education through a professional rugby union career.

Emphasising the first of these, Player Seventeen continued to speak of a former teammate who took action to create a work-based opportunity for himself once his career as a player was over:

There is a guy who now is working at an insurance company. He has been able to do that from getting an education, spending time with the firm and working into that life. I think in three to four years' time you are going to have a rash of guys retiring.

(Player Seventeen. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012)

This statement underlines the importance of players gaining work experience while they are currently playing professional rugby. While Player Seventeen admitted that he would not have enjoyed doing it, the fact remains that extra-rugby work experience does help provide a transition to another form of paid employment. Player Seventeen's language directly matches with Levitas's SID model. As identified throughout the thesis, SID identifies paid employment as the principal or solitary valid means of assimilating individuals into society (Levitas 1997). The analysis of the players' statements uncovered that senior players overwhelmingly participated in a dominant SID tone, focusing on the need to develop skills to allow for professional options once their career on the pitch is over.

Second, a common suggestion among other experienced rugby union players in the sample who employed the SID approach was that all players continue their formal academic education in the early years of their professional careers in order to prepare themselves for work after their athletic careers end. Below are several examples of this discourse, provided by some of the study's players:

Insuring people get the right education so they don't leave with nothing because that departure could be at any moment through injury or end of a contract. (Player Eighteen. Personal Interview. 14 December 2011)

The player should always pursue something else as an academy player. For example, doing a part time degree. I do think it is an awful lot to take on, especially as an academy player. If things don't work out, it can leave you in a tricky situations. So I think for an academy player it is a big thing if you are not getting a part time degree to do something. Do some coaching or have something to fall back on. (Player Sixteen. Personal Interview. 16 May 2012)



They cannot abandon their education. If they leave the game at seventeen they have a hell of a lot of catching up to do. If they leave the game at 21 or 22 and have not done anything since they left school, that is a huge void and then you have the extreme of a 30-year-old who has been in professional rugby for 13 years and leaves with nothing other than with a pay-out at the end of the year. (Player Nineteen. Personal Interview. 29 June 2012)

The way I see it, if I get my university degree and other things don't work out in the professional game, I always have something to fall back on, which puts me at a level of comfort. (Player Fourteen. Personal Interview. 16 May 2012)

Underlining these points, when asked about the future of retirement preparation within rugby union, one research participant expressed a formal approach:

Life skill development will become bigger; possibly [RPA/RFU] move to a percentage goal where a number of players are required to be in graduate training if not some vocational training. There may be some form of minimal standards set up by the RFU, RPA and the Premiership. (Player Twenty-One. Personal interview. 19 March 2012)

The quote shows a significant awareness and assessment of the tools and mechanisms players currently receive. It also demonstrates sound thinking related to possible future options for athlete welfare protection. As stated earlier, the SID model focuses on paid employment as the principal or solely valid means of assimilating individuals into society. Equipping the athlete with a contingency plan for alternative employment increases the player's ability to acquire employment if and when his playing career has ended, thus

reducing his risk of not assimilating into non-professional athlete life and potentially being socially excluded.

These SID results are significant given the importance of how they help develop an understanding of when players begin to talk about player welfare and post-athletic career retirement plans. Moreover, there is policy significance to these debates: the RPA runs annual induction training sessions for each cohorts of new rugby union players. Included in this annual meeting is addressing the issue of retirement and the services the RPA offers to its membership. However the data suggests that the RPA's services are not utilized until four or more years of professional play. This leaves players who have four or less years of professional play in an arena of not engaging in retirement preparation.

#### 7.6 NED: Players' Welfare and Post-Athletic Retirement Plans

Among the sample, were 12 players who were in the first or second year of their first professional rugby union contract. Of these, seven used NED as their dominant way of talking about retirement and player welfare. For instance, Player Eleven - who just recently started the second year of his professional contract - recorded that he was aware that his career would eventually end, but that he had chosen not to actively engage in his retirement process:

Every player knows their career can finish tomorrow or that bad things can happen and will eventually end. I don't know if I just put it off in my mind about what I am going to do when I stop playing. (Player Eleven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012)

This is an example of a NED because Player Eleven admits that he is aware of the dangers associated with rugby union and that the career will eventually end. Even though he is equipped with that knowledge, he chooses to not engage in retirement preparation.

Similarly, Player Three - who grew up in the club's academy programme - echoed similar NED sentiment when he stated: "I will be fine; I will not get injured, which is not a very sensible. I will just come across it when it comes to that time" (Player Three, Personal Interview, 20 March 2012). Further, Player Twelve, who is in his second year of his first professional contract, laughed when I posed the question about preparing for retirement. His tone was shocked and almost offended when he responded: "Retirement? Retirement is not even on the radar for me" (Player Twelve, Personal Interview, 2 March 2012). Players Nine and Five, who are both navigating their way through their first year of their professional careers, reacted similarly to each other. They conceded that injury can end a career in professional rugby union but demonstrated an attitude that injury would not happen to them: "Of course injury can occur. I have been hurt... but never bad enough that it took me out completely. I mean, I return to the pitch every time. That is why I train hard in practice and lift heavy in the gym and listen to ... [name of the strength and conditioning coach, omitted here] so I do not catch a stinger<sup>34</sup>" (Player Nine. Personal Interview. 20 February 2012). Player Five similarly stated: "Everyone knows someone that has been hurt, and in some situations hurt rather badly, but it usually comes as the result of not properly binding or not playing with proper levels of confidence or intensity. If you train as you should, it is more than likely you will be fine" (Player Five. Personal Interview. 9 February 2012).

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<sup>34</sup> Slang for a bad injury.

These statements, made by Players Three, Five, Nine, Eleven and Twelve, resonate with the NED position. They recognize injury can occur and that it can end a career in professional rugby union. However, the group of players expressed a key feature of NED through their lackadaisical attitudes toward protecting themselves from the acknowledged risk of injury. This NED practice existed exclusively in those players who are in the early onset of their athletic careers, which suggests that younger players still do not prepare for their inevitable retirement from professional rugby.

#### 7.6.1 Exploring the Development of NED Attitudes

They [early professional career rugby union players] want to come in and train up until whatever hour it might be. [Then] they are quite happy to sit on an Xbox or PlayStation all afternoon.” (Player Eighteen. Personal Interview. 14 December 2011)

The above quote identifies how many early career professional rugby union players appear to have a greater interest in training and performance than in developing an additional skill set outside of rugby. As such, developing effective post-athletic career retirement plans and establishing effective models of player welfare is no easy task. The sociological question that emerges is, ‘Why does this happen?’ My findings presented above are significant but not altogether surprising given that Byrne (2011) identified that rugby union youth athletes (who are not yet on professional contracts) are willing to sacrifice potential future opportunities to pursue a career in professional sport by looking at rugby union academies in Ireland. My findings suggest similar results in English rugby due to the younger players’ inexperience. My results suggest that there are at least three – sometimes interrelated – reasons why a NED emerges. These are discussed below.

First, there is the idea amongst the younger players that post-athletic career plans require time to develop. Thus, while the player is still proving himself, he believes that he should prioritise developing his match performance through, for instance, extra training sessions over thinking long-term about his post-athletic career. In short, player welfare for early career rugby union athletes is focused on the club providing opportunities to better the player's performance. A player in the second year of his first contract spoke of such a relationship:

They [the club] need me to train a certain amount of hours a week to get me where I need to be physically, but also they need me to play a certain amount of hours or a certain amount of games to develop my game skills. They [the club] look after me so they can get me to where they want me to be. (Player Eleven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012)

This quote frames player welfare in terms of performance. Player Twelve understands welfare in terms of the club ensuring that he is getting enough time to develop his skill on the pitch so that the team can maximise his performance ability. He views player welfare not in terms of the individual but rather in terms of the team: the team cares for his welfare so they can maximise his contribution to the team, which will in turn advance his career.

Second, some players argued that injuries were temporary and therefore welfare provisions should not focus on overcoming such issues. For instance, one player that had recently started his second professional season - and was recovering from a knee injury at the time I interviewed him - stated he was somewhat concerned because he has had limited time with the coaches and has not been able to show the coaches his skills. Even though he was injured, his concern for his injury was not about the potential career ending possibility but

was rather related to his current performance as a player. He was worried that the injury would slow down his progression rather than being concerned that he might not recover. Indeed, he told me that “injury is temporary” (Player Nine. Personal Interview. 20 February 2012), reflecting his belief that he will recover from his injury and will be ‘fit’ again. With this in mind, he believed that there was no reason why he should entertain ideas of post-athletic career plans.

Third, a main theme in the ideas expressed by those who use NED was the reference to pursuing the ‘dream’ of playing professional rugby union – perhaps representing their country internationally (see Harris 2010 for a discussion of the importance of international club-based rugby union). The athletes expressed their desire to limit the number of distractions that were not rugby related and/or performance-centred. In short, anything that would not improve their playing abilities was viewed as a ‘waste of time’. Post-athletic retirement plans would not stand in front of their ambitions (this is not to imply that those who discussed player welfare and athletic retirement plans in RED or SID terms did not harbour similar ambitions). Indeed, rugby union players spoke of the willingness to sacrifice educational and career building opportunities as well as family and friends in their pursuit of securing a career in professional sport. When I asked the athletes directly about sacrificing future opportunities for a career in rugby there was an overwhelming acknowledgement that they were aware of the sacrifice they were making. For example, Player Three noted: “Yeah definitely, there is always a sacrifice you have to make with your friends, family, Uni[versity]”. Player Ten, a second year professional athlete who participated in the research also spoke to the issue of sacrificing his education. He contended that if he had

continued down a traditional educational path, he would not be in the position that he is currently in:

If I would have gone to school, I wouldn't be where I am at - no question. You only get one chance at it [professional rugby]. You cannot come back at thirty-five and say, 'I want to play professional rugby'. (Player Ten. Personal Interview. 1 May 2012).

There seems to be a belief amongst the young athletes that participated in this research that the opportunity to become a professional athlete requires sacrifices. Further, they seem to fear that losing sight of the objective of success would negatively impact their future career. Byrne (2011) also found this to be true in his research about the professional rugby academy structure in Ireland:

Once players become a part of their respective academies some felt like they had to sacrifice or put on hold other pursuits in their life in order to succeed at rugby.  
(Byrne, 2011: 89)

The objective of winning that exists in professional sport and the drive to produce a cohesive playing unit are the sources of an individual athlete's willingness to sacrifice family, friends and future. The goal of victory fuels the player's feeling that he must sacrifice in order to participate at an elite level of sport. Player Seven, who is in his first year of professional rugby union, articulated this explicitly:

Professional sport is about winning and producing a winning team. I don't think there is really much room for other things. We all make sacrifices in pursuit of being a professional rugby player. (Player Seven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012).

The desire to focus complete attention on developing a career in professional rugby produced a self-imposed attitudinal barrier. This self-inflicted barrier appears to have provided a legitimate excuse for these younger players to not take an active role in preparing for a life after rugby, thus facilitating NED. It is an attitudinal barrier in the sense that players want to invest all of their energy in present career development. They feel that the required training time as well as the obligation to the team would make it difficult to pursue personal development goals. Additionally, they feel that such a pursuit could negatively impact their development as a player. The players who participated in the research spoke of the difficulty of pursuing other opportunities due to the high levels of training. Moreover, they argued that the free time they do have does not afford them the opportunity to pursue other avenues (see quote below). Additionally, entertaining retirement from the career they are working towards appears to be impossible.

A lot of the free time is not particularly useable. [A] Typical day would start at nine or ten [and go] till three. Lot of free time around lunch time, you have free time at the end of the day, but you can't go anywhere. You cannot do anything because you are too tired or you have to be in early the next day, so it kind of takes over your life.

(Player Seven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012).

Similar sentiments were expressed by another player who participated in the research and who maintained that the nature of the game limits the opportunities to be an active participant in retirement preparation:

You are pretty much fresh out of school, so if you get signed right out of school you are eighteen. Train every day and you don't do anything else. So basically my average day: I would go do weights at the club, have lunch at the club and then train



at the club. I would be done around two every day. Then from two on, I would have nothing to do. That's your day. Unless you are doing extra studies, but not many players do. (Player Four. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012).

Another research participant expressed similar thoughts when he stated that he would find pursuing development opportunities difficult because of the expectations required of him at the club. When asked about attempting to play professional rugby and attend university, he said, "I would struggle to juggle my academic commitments" (Personal Interview. Player Eight. 11 February 2012). This statement is very representative of participants talking in terms of NED and provides a possible explanation for why many of the younger players do not pursue extra studies. Statements such as those above were very common amongst those who spoke in a performance-driven NED. Others included:

You can't study full time; you would not be able to go to your nine o'clock lectures because training comes first. (Player Eight. Personal Interview. 11 February 2012)

You can't do anything because you are too tired from training. (Player Four, 20 March 2012)

The pressure load is so high that actually I am reluctant to take part. I got to focus on being a rugby player. (Player One. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012)

It's your job, and if it is going to make you a better rugby player why on earth would you not want to do it? (Player Five. Personal Interview. 9 February 2012)

With the focus on the sport there is not much flexibility to be anyone other than that. (Player Six. Personal Interview. 17 April 2012)

It is difficult once you are in the professional sport. Professional sport is all about winning. The whole structure is designed to produce a winning team. We make sacrifices in the pursuit of becoming professional athlete. (Player Ten. Personal Interview. 1 May 2012)

[The] struggle, the intensity of full time rugby and the intensity of being a young player in this environment... you are constantly being assessed, you are constantly striving to improve... and I think personally it is a struggle to continue an education whilst pursuing full time rugby. Many run away from it. (Player Seven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012).

Byrne's (2011) research findings on the career pathways of young players at Irish Rugby Football academies appear to support my argument about NED. He found similar responses from younger players on the issue of performance and the avoidance of addressing their own welfare concerns. A difficulty that was expressed in Byrne's research by current and former academy players was the related to striking a balance between performance engagement and higher education. From the responses gathered in my data combined with Byrne's, it is apparent that demands placed on the elite rugby player have continued to intensify, forcing players to make sacrifices which could have negative impacts on acquiring employment once their career as a professional rugby union player is completed. Byrne's research participants expressed comparable statements to my own interviewees on the need to sacrifice skill and education development in order to pursue a career in professional rugby union:

It is tough balancing academic responsibilities in conjunction with your rugby commitments. (Byrne 2009: 56)

I found it hard to balance both, I missed a lot of classes as I was constantly on the go and it's hard to motivate myself to go to college after training when I was wrecked. (Byrne 2009: 56)

The responses of Byrne's research participants support my argument that these young athletes are either more focused on their current situation of developing their career or enjoying the moment of being a professional athlete. As such, planning for retirement is not a priority.

This is a concern for those starting their career in professional rugby union since the longer they are involved in the professional game, the less likely they are to pursue a degree.

Player Nine, who recently signed his second professional contract, stated as much:

If you have been involved in an international set up since the age of sixteen and you work your way up through the age groups, the likelihood is you are not going to university. Well, you might do a part time degree, but to primarily focus on your degree at university is becoming less frequent (Player Nine. Personal Interview. 20 February 2012)

A couple of senior players also remarked on the NED approach taken by the younger players. Player Twenty-One, who is in his sixth year of professional play, spoke about how the younger players have a short-term view of what a player's life should be:

A lot of the younger lads, and I think this is a generational thing, their perception of professional rugby is training, going home, PlayStation, Nandos, good night. I think

that is their perception of life as a professional rugby player, I think. (Player Twenty-One. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012)

His comments both underscores the younger players' focus on training and express how limited the younger players' focus is regarding their own future. They are far too content strictly to train and spend their remaining time on playing video games and eating chicken.

Research has established that athletes do include preparing for retirement when identifying the welfare issues of professional athletes (Alfermann 2001; Bussmann & Alfermann 1994; Boothby; Boothby, J., Tungatt and Townsend 1981). The point of this argument, however, is to identify a shift that is occurring within the rugby union playing community: the emergence of the community's SID dominant language. This finding is potentially significant when addressing the topic of athlete welfare. The discourse of the participating rugby union athletes indicate a willingness to prepare if given the encouragement and the mechanisms to do so. This desire to prepare for retirement is a significant contribution to existing discussions about athletic retirement. Stambulova et al. (2009) and Fernandez, Stephan and Fouquereau (2006) identify the complexity of the retirement process for athletes and the need for tools to assist them in their retirement process. While the existing body of literature identifies the need for mechanisms to help the athlete, it lacks consideration of specific programmes in which athletes would be willing to participate in order to address the intricacies of retirement.

To address this gap, this thesis provides an exploration of programmes in which athletes have expressed a willingness to participate in order to help navigate the difficulties of retirement. This is potentially significant in that it makes a contribution to the development of mechanisms that could help the athlete before and during the retirement process.

While the players' discourses did not result in step-by-step instructions on what players thought should be done, they did provide a clearer understanding of the types of programmes that would be welcomed for assisting in the retirement and welfare protection process. Understanding the tone and nature of their dominant language towards the topic of player welfare, including retirement preparation, is an important step in the creation and development of a welfare policy. Establishing an understanding of the players' views of retirement preparation allows those who are designing a policy to best match desired outcomes with welcomed plans of action.

However, the ability to gauge the effectiveness of the policy through the present study's use of player discourse is difficult to ascertain. Determining the impact of the RPA's policy is difficult to gauge since the player discourse does not provide that level of data.

Nevertheless, it does lay the groundwork for understanding what types of policies would be well received by the playing community and thus paves the way for future research which could look at the effectiveness of the discourse typologies.

### 7.7. Other Discourses

The RED approach to redistribution of resources in times of injury and/or hardship is similar to the traditional workers' compensation programmes offered in other employment sectors (Gorsky 1998; Simon 1995). In this thesis RED is the second most-shared discourse expressed by the players when discussing player welfare specifically and the most shared dialogue when discussing welfare in general. There is a concern amongst players of the long-term care that they may require as a result of playing rugby union at the professional level. Player Twenty-Two, a six-year veteran of professional rugby union, expressed his concern

about the potential physical impact the game may have. Additionally, he voiced his feeling that there should be a redistributive mechanism to assist in care:

Rugby has not been played at this level of intensity very long, so who knows what my body is going to be like. That is a concern. I mean, you read about the stories from America about what is going on with the NFL and the long-term impact going on with those guys. Granted the game is a bit different, but we both engage in a high level of abuse and contact. I would not be surprised if we see similar results occurring, like bad knees, necks, brains. I think there should be some support provided by someone in rugby, but the RPA or the RFU that is there to provide help with things like that.

(Player Twenty-Two. Personal Interview. 19 March 19 2012)

A majority of interviewees in this study expressed a need to have a plan of action to address the issue of retirement. This is fuelled by their knowledge that a career in professional sport is uncertain and unpredictable. Retirement can be the consequence of a personal decision to leave the game, but it can also be an unplanned action resulting from injury. Regardless of how the termination occurs, the critical issue is the ability to adapt to the change in sudden employment status. From the language of the participating players, it is clear that there is a concern about how they are going to financially support themselves and their families once their career is over. Player Nineteen is representative of this concern:

Rugby is in a good position at the moment, and I don't think the players worry too much about where rugby [union] is. From their perspective, their worry is life outside, life beyond rugby. If you don't get a contract for the next year, where does that leave you? There is not much to fall back on. (Player Nineteen. Personal Interview. 29 June 2012).

The above statement resonates with an earlier statement made by Player Fourteen regarding the importance of having a 'fall-back' plan for if/when the rugby career ends. The data indicates that players spoke predominantly used SID to assist in that career transition.

A key feature of this chapter has been the recognition of a transition within individual athletes from the time when they do not prepare for retirement to the time where they begin to recognise the importance of considering it. The dominantly-shared SID statements illustrate a desire to prepare for a life after a career in sport. The one question that the statements fail to critically evaluate is why the concern for a life after rugby occurs exclusively within the discourse of players who have four or more years of professional experience. What is causing the player to make the transition from not being concerned about life after rugby within the first two years of their rugby career to actively participating in development opportunities?

While that question is beyond the scope of this research, how the language affects player welfare is within its purview. The next sub-section will look at the possible concerns that NED has on player welfare.

The effort to effectively address the issue of athlete retirement and to protect the welfare of an athlete is inherently difficult. Yet, it is rendered even more difficult when the RPA must consider the use of NED by the newest and potentially most vulnerable segment of the professional rugby union community.

A common factor that existed amongst those who used RED and SID was that they had either personally experienced injury or had seen others experience career ending injury. This could possibly explain why those who have played longer at the professional level

speak in RED and SID terms more than those who have not had those experiences. Those who have played at the professional level longer have become more familiar with injury and can thus see the importance of protecting themselves and preparing for retirement.

If the player needs to experience injury himself to move from NED to a more active pursuit of SID, RPA's task is problematized. The athlete that participates in NED is at the greatest risk of exclusion if seriously injured and unable to return to rugby union. This is because those who are injured and return have the opportunity to experience the 'wake-up call' and take advantage of the increasing welfare mechanisms to protect themselves. Those who are more severely injured and do not return are denied the opportunity to prepare; they never get to benefit from the welfare protection mechanisms offered to them through the RPA's Benevolent Fund.

## 7.8 Conclusion

This chapter argued that the once-upheld position that elite level athletes do not properly prepare for a life after professional sport is experiencing a transition. It is being replaced by athletes who are becoming increasingly active in their retirement process. This argument was supported directly through the discourse patterns of 24 current professional rugby union athletes playing in England's rugby union Premiership. By employing the analytical lens of Levitas's discourse models, this chapter contended, through the use of the players' own language, that the majority of the participating athletes are aware of their welfare and that they are concerned about the impacts that rugby union could have on the rest of their life. The dominant RED and SID typologies expressed by the participating players illustrates their understanding of welfare. Moreover, the use of these typologies suggest that the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund is in line with the wants and needs of the professional rugby



union player. However, it cannot be determined at this time if the RPA has created their policies from the direction of the players or if the policy message of the RPA has been incorporated into the language of the player. Regardless of the cause, the data indicated that players may be more willing to prepare for retirement if given the mechanisms and support to do so. This position is supported by 50 per cent of the participating players' participation in Levitas's SID typology.

The majority of the participating players understood that the life span of the professional rugby career is short and unpredictable, and can be curtailed by career ending injuries. The players' participation in two of Levitas's three discourse models indicates a level of interest in their own welfare as professional athletes and a conscious awareness that some level of preparation for retirement is necessary. This preparation may be provided by the club in a distributive manner, as seen in RED, or in a fashion where the players develop skills that allow them to pursue other forms of employment, as promoted by SID. By providing mechanism that promote retirement it promotes a transition from NED to SID allow allowing the player to have greater levels of satisfaction in the retirement process. As stated by Webb et al. (1998), Anderson and Morris (2000), Lavalley (2000) and Cecic-Erpic, Wylleman and Zupancic (2004), those who are active participants in their retirement are more satisfied with the retirement experience.

While this thesis has identified a transition in the way in which athletes in rugby union approach welfare, it also reveals that a group of players exist who do not properly prepare for retirement. The existence of such a group of players, supports the existing body of literature that argues that athletes do not properly prepare for retirement (Ballie 1993;

Ballie and Danish 1992; Werther & Orlick 1986; Ogilvie & Howe 1982; Lerch 1981; McPherson 1980).

This chapter further argued that those players who do not properly prepare for retirement and who are using NED are participating in a traditional sports ethic, which is: athletes will sacrifice those things they feel could negatively impact their pursuit of athletic success. This position was confirmed by participants' statements in Section 7.5, in which they declared that they are willing to sacrifice education and skill development in order to pursue their desire to be a professional rugby union player and to insure that they remain a professional rugby union player. I make this argument to identify and confirm what is widely known about the retirement process within professional sports. However, it also provides the foundation for the second and more significant argument: that athletes will participate in procedures to prepare for retirement if the mechanisms and support are provided to decrease the risk of social exclusion.

The identified NED language was only expressed by rugby union athletes who are in the first two years of their professional career. When I analysed the welfare discourse of players who have four or more years of experience in the professional format of rugby union, the NED language had all but disappeared and was replaced with a dominant SID-informed discourse. The players' SID language focuses on providing education and skill development as a tactic to prevent social exclusion. This is in contrast to a traditional redistributive approach which addresses social exclusion once it has already occurred.

The redistributive model represents a system of social exclusion prevention by which the athlete receives a level of assistance to address injury or hardship. But with the increase in physical strength and power may also have a secondary effect on the future lives of those

who are presently still able-bodied but who may require medical attention later in life on account of the years of physical stress and collection of injuries. Cumulative long-term care addresses the provision of possible medical care for players after their playing career has ended and as a result of years of physical abuse on their body. The main expressed concern by the RPA is the deficit in knowledge about the long-term physical effect of playing professional level rugby. As established in previous chapters, players are stronger and faster as the result of intense training. However, the looming question of the long-term impacts of rugby on the body was succinctly expressed by Player Twenty-Three: “I am not sure what the impacts of playing rugby at this level will be long-term” (Player Twenty-Three. Personal Interview. 17 April 2012). However, as Player Sixteen stated in section 7.5, knowing that there is a level of redistributive care provides a level of comfort: “I think it is a good thing that people know they are being looked after” (Player Sixteen. Personal Interview. 29 June 2012).

The RED language used by the participating players supports my argument that redistributive care is an important programme and will become increasingly important as the long-term impacts of professional rugby begin to be realized. While the redistributive approach is helpful and provides much-needed welfare-related services, the RED approach is short-term and relieves exclusion for only short periods of time. The dominant SID approach of the participating players identifies how athletes are willing to plan for their future if given the proper mechanisms.

SID is a form of welfare which focuses on decreasing the need for redistribution-based benefits - the ‘hand-out’ - by providing the means for players to become self-sufficient. This is achieved by a ‘hand-up’ approach: by giving athletes opportunities, while they are still

professional players, to develop skills and gain trade training and education. The aim is to provide pathways for employment while they are still contracted players so that when the player confronts retirement, the transition to another form of employment is possible. The consequences are decreases in unemployment and social exclusion.

That the SID model was the dominant language used by players when discussing mechanisms to provide player welfare, leads me to confidently argue that players want to actively participate in both their development into and away from their career in professional rugby union. This argument provides a contrary position to the existing body of literature that posits that athletes do not prepare for retirement. From the data collected in this study, it can be suggested that, with the right mechanisms in place, athletes will take advantage of opportunities to develop employable skill sets, qualifications and education. By employing SID and acting in a SID fashion, athletes are creating their own means for reducing their risk of social exclusion.

The aim of this this chapter was to explore the statements of the 24 professional rugby union players to establish the most commonly shared understanding of player welfare. In order to establish the dominant discourse, I used Levitas's analytical discourse framework. From that basis, I was able to present the two main arguments in this chapter. First, that those early career professional rugby union players (usually those within their first or second years of a professional contract) tend to show less concern about their post athletic career retirement plans and have not properly prepared for it. Second, such views and plans often change over the course of a career, with older players being more likely to prepare for their athletic retirement.

The discovery of the dominant NED, which occurred exclusively within players who were in their first and second year of their professional career, directly supports my first argument that rugby union players who are beginning their professional career are less concerned about preparing for a life after rugby. This lack of concern presents an increased risk for exclusion, as these players have not had the opportunity to take advantage of development programmes. This places them at a disadvantage when attempting to secure alternative employment. As suggested in this thesis, those who pursue a career in professional rugby union make sacrifices, including sacrifices in skill and educational development.

Relinquishing these experiences in the name of pursuing a professional rugby career could limit an athlete's ability to acquire later employment. Those players who continue their career in professional rugby union beyond a few years are exposed to the realities of being a professional athlete and start to participate in the commonly shared understanding that they need to prepare for a life after rugby. This evolution of thought supports my second argument of this chapter: that players' views and plans often change over the course of a career. The dominantly shared SID tone of the participating players who have played four or more professional seasons indicates that athletes do have an understanding that they need to prepare for retirement. For many athletes, the change in attitude is the result of seeing fellow players, who do not have a 'fall-back' plan, being forced to retire due to injury. The greater level of exposure to career ending injuries which comes with multiple seasons of playing professional rugby union could explain how players evolve from the NED approach - not being overly concerned about player welfare - to a RED approach - knowing that there is a level of protection promised through contractual obligation - to a SID approach - where athletes support the importance of acquiring educational and vocational training. This final approach allows them to be actively involved in their own protection and welfare as an

athlete. The dominantly shared understanding that player welfare includes providing opportunities for personal development, as expressed by the participating athletes, reflects the same dominantly shared understanding of player welfare articulated by the Board of Trustees of the Benevolent Fund.

## **Chapter Eight:**

### **Discussion**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

It is well established that a major obstacle for elite athletes who are converting from a sporting career to a non-sporting one is the lack of formal mechanisms available to help with the transition (Stambulova, Alfermann, Starleree and Coted 2007; Franade, Stephen and Frouquereu 2006). Indeed, the retirement procedure involves a series of different processes and actions that can lead to what the athlete perceives as negative changes relating to personal identity (athlete to former athlete); moreover, these mechanisms often result in financial concerns for the athlete (Coakley 1983; Wylleman, Alfermann and Levallee 2004). While these processes are not unique to sport (Harte 1972), in this thesis I have explored the mechanisms that the RPA established for rugby union players' retirement plans, and listened to players' voices to examine how these procedures are perceived by the athletes themselves. To do this, I use Levitas's (1996a; 1996b; 2004; 2005) discourses of social exclusion to analyse the players' and RPA staff and trustees' rhetoric around the policy provisions offered by the RPA. As such, my thesis allows me to discuss: i) the effectiveness of the RPA's plans for the current playing community; ii) elements of good practice in the match-up of players' discourses and the RPA provisions; iii) areas where these practices can be improved to access 'hard to reach' communities in professional rugby union and iv) theoretical contributions in the critical understanding of Levitas's work. The substantive results I detail in this thesis unpacks the types of language employed by both the RPA and players regarding the discourse of player welfare and post-athletic retirement preparation in professional rugby union in England. Using Levitas's social

exclusion classifications as lenses through which I perceive the data, I conclude that the RPA speaks of player welfare in SID-dominant tones. While the Benevolent Fund provides redistributive programmes to players during times of injury and hardship, the main thrust of the RPA's Benevolent Fund's welfare programme is the 'Life After Rugby' scheme which exists to prepare athletes for a productive life once their professional athletic career has concluded.

By contrast, the players' language towards welfare and retirement policy produces mixed results. The data shows a schism occurring in the language between those who have five or more years of experience and those who have four or less years of experience. The player data indicates that players who have greater experience spoke in a SID-dominant tone and are actively seeking for networking and development opportunities from which they may benefit once their career as a professional athlete has concluded. However, the data also identified a minority tone expressed by players with less experience which did not correlate with Levitas's classifications. This particular discourse identifies a flaw within Levitas's existing classification structure, but it also identifies a group of players the RPA is failing to reach. As such, these players are at risk of becoming excluded if the RPA's Benevolent Fund does not alter how its 'Life After Rugby' programme is promoted. This chapter will consider this flaw and present possible solutions for addressing this hard-to-reach segment of professional rugby players.

## 8.2 The Effectiveness of the RPA's plans Amongst the Current Playing Community

In Chapter Seven, I found that there was a significant change in the players' tone towards retirement preparations as the player gathered experience in his role as a professional athlete. The more experience the player gained on the field tended to mean the more he



understood the need to prepare for a career once he was no longer able to play at the professional level. This desire to prepare for retirement from professional rugby union and create employment opportunities relates directly to the RPA's policy; it likewise corresponds with the practice of 'Life After Rugby', a programme that promotes job training and/or education which may aid in the athlete's career transition process.

This change in attitude towards retirement in relation to experience is not unique to rugby. Baruch (2013), Griffin, Loh, & Hesketh, B. (2012) and Harte (1972) all identified similar results in retirement preparation in other forms of employment. Retirement preparation is more likely to occur towards the end of a career than at the beginning of one. However, in the case of professional rugby union, retirement occurs much earlier in life. Reitman (2013) indicated that while the average age of retirement is 62-65, in professional rugby union retirement occurs when a player is in his or her mid-to-late 30's. Furthermore, professional sport innately possesses a high level of unpredictability and uncertainty, which makes the preparation for retirement difficult to gauge in a linear time scale. This in turn makes it difficult for athletes to gauge their retirement preparation in similar terms to those used in the studies listed above. However, what is common in all careers is that the individual's level of experience and time spent in his or her field determine his or her ability to evaluate the need to start preparing for retirement. The data gathered from the players supports this statement.

The data presented in Chapter Seven indicated that career experience and time spent in professional rugby has an effect on how players discuss their understanding of, and approach to, retirement preparation. This change in attitude is not dissimilar to Harte's (1972) work on retirement preparation in wider society. Harte (1972) contended that

attitude is a key feature that affects retirement preparation. Harte's position supports the data I collected from players' statements, from which I found that a change in attitude is not only a significant element but also a required one for the player's transition from NED to SID. In other words, the athlete needs to make a personal decision to prepare for retirement; until then, the amount of opportunities the athlete is given to prepare for retirement is irrelevant. For example, the players who employed NED tones do not believe that they need to prepare for retirement. They have an attitude position that injury will not force them into retirement and/or retirement will not be a relevant topic for several years. By contrast, players that speak in SID tones express a change in retirement attitude as they gain more experience – they are more accepting of the fact that preparation is important.

The data gathered from the players also corresponds to Baruch's study (2013), which found that the concept of retirement as well as the preparation for retirement will mostly like occur towards the end of one's career. Table 7.2 in Chapter Seven showed a clear relationship between career experience/time spent and the dominant discourse a player uses to express his understanding of retirement preparation. Unlike those on a traditional career path, the professional athlete has greater difficulty determining when his career will end and establishing a point at which it is useful to start preparing for retirement. This places an added level of pressure and urgency on the RPA to encourage players to start preparing for retirement as soon as possible. Griffen, Hesketh, Loh, (2012) presented an argument that people create their own, distinctive model of planning for retirement based on their life expectancy. This becomes difficult when dealing with professional sports, where the labour force is comprised of extremely physically fit young men.

Chapter Seven presented several examples of professional rugby union players who have just begun their career laughing at the idea of preparing for retirement. The existence of a NED-style tone such as these players used would not surprise Baruch (2013) or Griffen, Hesketh and Loh, (2012), who all contended that retirement is a topic that is typically addressed later in one's career. It is not atypical, then, for rugby players who are in the infancy of their career to not be thinking about or preparing for retirement; such is the case with any individual in an early career stage. However, the attitude change necessarily occurs at a much earlier stage for the professional rugby player than it does for their peers on traditional career paths. So while the professional rugby player is consistent with other labour groups in delaying his preparation for retirement, the point at which he does start to focus on retirement preparation occurs far sooner than it does for other labour groups. Due to the short nature of a career in professional rugby, the longer a rugby player occupies a NED attitude, the greater his chances of not properly preparing himself for a life after rugby. It is essential in light of this that a discussion is had around what the RPA can do to urge players to engage in SID-dominant discourse about retirement.

Building on findings from the data, I present two potential solutions that may increase player awareness about, and possibly the effectiveness of, the RPA's promotion of their 'Life After Rugby' programme. First, drawing on the player statements in Chapter Seven, I found that players who spoke in SID-dominant tones all shared a story of injury – either personal or that of a fellow teammate – which caused them to think more critically about their own situation. It was experiencing injury first or second hand that prompted them to feel concern about their own post rugby opportunities. Just as in other professions, the realization of the end of one's retirement has become personally understood (Griffin, Loh and Hesketh 2012). The difficulty, then, lies in creating personal experience not for those

who need to prepare but for those who have not yet personally *experienced* the need to prepare.

Based on the data, the RPA should create a mentoring programme that pairs up players who are entering professional rugby with players who have experienced multiple seasons and are aware of the realities of injury and the dangers associated with being a professional athlete. By establishing this relationship, the senior player can share his personal stories of injury or the injury stories of other professional players as a tactic to speed up the junior player's personal connection to injury. This suggestion is based on the understanding that waiting for the younger players to make that connection on their own furthers the risk that the realisation may come too late. Forging a relationship between generations of players could help allow for adoption of SID language prior to a player's fourth season as a professional athlete. This would resonate with Hopley's desires when his experience of injury prompted him to muster support for the formation of the RPA. Hopley leveraged the influence of senior players to promote the idea of and establish the need for a players' association amongst the younger players. Using the influence of senior players to promote RPA policy would be an identical tactic to the "herd mentality" Hopley spoke about (see Chapter Six).

In Chapter Seven, I also discussed attitudinal issues caused by the structural nature of the professional game. Several players in this research as well from the research conducted by Byrne (2011) on Irish professional players expressed that the structural design of their day prevents exploring options other than rugby. The current structure of professional rugby union operates on a system of relegation and promotion. This means that teams have the ability to transfer between league divisions based on the team's performance. In the RFU

the lowest-ranked team will be relegated to the Championship series while the top team in the Championship series will be promoted to the Premiership. The team being relegated is at risk not only of losing their Premiership status but also of losing the resources offered to them through the Development Manager. Under the current structure, the team being relegated is extended their full pay and all benefits under the Premiership contract for one year. However if the team fails to return to the Premiership, the Development Manager is assigned to another club and the RPA's services are no longer at the disposal of the team that was relegated. This structural arrangement shows a hole in the safety net of player welfare. This scenario of relegations shows how a player could find himself needing additional employment, yet the mechanism which is designed to assist in that action is no longer at his disposal. To address this, the RFU either needs to establish a closed league similar to the structure in Australia (this will be explored further in the following section), or it needs to start providing the resources necessary to extend RPA Development Managers to clubs in both the Premiership and the Championship divisions. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, elite athletes find it difficult to transition from a sporting career to a non-sporting career because of the lack of formal mechanisms to aid in the transition. It is possible that the transition could become even more difficult if the mechanisms of care they have been utilising are stripped away from them as a result of relegation. In a career filled with unpredictability and uncertainty such as sport, it is important to create an operational structure that provides a consistent product of care to reduce the potentially negative impacts of the profession. Currently the structure of the RPA still allows for a level of insecurity as a result of the relegation structure.

When looking at the issue of effectiveness and efficiency of current and possible future initiatives of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, there is a perceived structural hindrance expressed

by those that spoke in NED terms. Chapter Seven identified that several players, typically those in the early years of their career, expressed how the structure of the training day creates a level of obstruction which makes pursuing development opportunities difficult and/or less attractive. For instance, Players Seven and Eight both expressed how their training and practice schedules do not encourage them to participate in opportunities outside of training:

A lot of the free time is not particularly useable. [A] Typical day would start at nine or ten till three. Lot of free time around lunch time, you have free time at the end of the day, but you can't go anywhere. You cannot do anything because you are too tired or you have to be in early the next day, so it kind of takes over your life. (Player Seven. Personal Interview. 20 March 2012)

You can't study full time; you would not be able to go to your nine o'clock lectures because training comes first. (Player Eight. Personal Interview. 11 February 2012)

The above statements re-establish that players feel that their training schedule hampers their ability and availability to develop employable skills. As a result, they take the path of 'least resistance' and elect to not participate in post-athletic retirement preparations. In an attempt to fulfil the requirements of training at a professional level while also increasing the effectiveness of the programme's impact, a possible structural review of the training week/day could assist in accomplishing both goals. To achieve this, the RPA could negotiate for an additional day off from training or lobby for a structured training schedule which would allow for more 'useful time' for the athlete to pursue development opportunities.

The English structure currently includes one full day during the work week away from training. However, in Australia players are given two days a week away for training. In my

discussions with Hopley, the former rugby athlete underscored the possibilities inherent in two days away from training – one as a personal day and the second devoted to developing non-rugby skills or gaining education. It should also be noted that Australia rugby union is a closed league and does not relegate or promote teams to or from a lower level tier of rugby union. It could be argued that by having a closed league, athletes and teams are not in fear of being relegated, thus causing the club to be more willing to offer an additional day off from practice. While England does subscribe to relegation, there are few teams in the Championship League that have the playing facilities that would allow them to be promoted. The RFU requires that Premiership teams receive first-pick for playing venues as well as teams can “demonstrate that they can host home fixtures at the time stipulated by Premiership Rugby and/or the host broadcaster.”<sup>35</sup> Most of the teams in the Championship League would not pass the RFU audit allowing them to be promoted; therefore, the Premiership is essentially a closed league. To increase the effectiveness of the programme as well to prevent the issue of players losing their Benevolent Fund resources as a result of relegation (as identified in the previous section), it may be important to close the league, thus allowing players more time to increase the effectiveness and quality of current post retirement preparation initiatives.

### 8.3 How ‘Demand-Side Stakeholders’ Can Drive the Welfare Discussion

The RPA is an example of how a ‘demand-side stakeholder’ is a preferable provider of welfare mechanisms to the ‘supply-side stake holder’ of the RFU or club management. To review, ‘supply-side stake holders’ – owners of production – place greater emphasis on management decisions to maximise financial returns and operational control while the

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/sport/0/rugby-union/18175903>

‘demand-side stakeholder’ – employees or consumers – emphasise the quality of service (Ben-Ner and Gui’s 2003). ‘Supply-side stakeholders’ have a profit motivation that may interfere with providing the quality of care; as stated by Ben-Ner and Gui (2003; 752), “For-profit firms have the incentive to take advantage of demand-side stakeholders”. In Chapter Six, Hopley and Barnes both spoke of the concerns team owners and the RFU had about the formation of a players’ association. Owners and the RFU were apprehensive about a players’ association because of the potential impact they thought it may have on the teams’ profitability. The reaction of the RFU and team owners supports Ben-Ner and Gui’s position that ‘supply-side stakeholders’ places emphasis on maximising profitability, which may call into question the quality of care and the amount of services being provided to a player. This issue is not only found in rugby union; for instance, the National Football League in the United States has recently had to address the issues of concussion. The NFL agreed to pay out 765 million US dollars for medical costs and related research. Caplan and Lee (2013) outlined the particular pay-outs:

Individual awards will be capped at \$5 million for players suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, \$4 million for deaths from chronic traumatic encephalopathy, and \$3 million for those suffering from dementia. The average spread over all the plaintiffs comes to \$166,000 per person. That kind of money is a lot to scoff at because treating and managing significant and complex medical conditions can quickly eat away at patients’ and their relatives’ savings accounts.

While the patients and victims are receiving a certain level of care, the pay-out was in favour of the ‘supply-side stakeholder’. Malher (2013) identified how the deal protected the NFL:



But it's still a sweetheart deal for the NFL: just \$765 million, paid out over 20 years.

To put that figure into context, the NFL's 2012 revenues totalled \$9.5 billion. Better yet, the league's estimated revenue for 2025, when it will still be handing out loose change to the families of players who committed suicide after suffering from chronic traumatic encephalopathy, are projected at \$25 billion... the settlement explicitly states that the agreement is not an admission by the NFL of liability, or an acknowledgement that the injuries of the plaintiffs were caused by football... In other words, the league has agreed to make this \$765 million payment simply because it was feeling generous.

The purpose for including this example of the NFL is to highlight that supply-side stakeholders will typically make decisions that protect profit margins. The action of the NFL was more related to protecting the organization and reducing the financial exposure than it was connected with providing assistance to those athletes who are now suffering as a result of their participation in professional American football.

This same behaviour can be seen in an example within the RFU. In Chapter, Six Hopley described the injury scenario of Matt Hampson. While the RFU extended a caregiver to Hampson, the caregiver's contract was based on time, not on need. Hampson's biography specifically addressed this issue; in it, readers could peruse published letters between the RFU and the Hampson family that informed the family the RFU would no longer pay for the caregiver even though Hampson was still in need. As such, what was best for Hampson did not play into the RFU's decision related to the length of the contract; instead, the RFU was strictly concerned with its financial exposure.

By contrast, the RPA is an organization that represents the interests of the athlete and places an emphasis on quality of service. The entire mission of the RPA is to tend to the welfare concerns and needs of the athlete. This responsibility identifies the RPA as a 'demand-side stakeholder' and a more justified body to provide quality care. The 'demand-side stakeholder' places importance on the quality and fairness of services rather than on cost of services. This should result in greater care and a greater variety of services.

The RPA bears some similarity to the 'Friendly Societies' of the eighteenth century. Simon (1995) and Gorsky (1998) spoke of 'Friendly Societies' as groups of people, typically associated through trade, who pool resources to help pay for medical care and expenses during times of hardship. As their understanding of welfare needs evolved with the professional game, the RPA extended the 'Friendly Society' to include training and education that would assist players in preparing for a new career. This willingness to adapt and address new ideas highlights how the RPA is the most justified organization to champion the needs of the professional rugby union athlete. The RPA can be seen as an example of an organization that has had some success in underscoring the need to prepare for a life after playing professional sport.

#### 8.4 Using Levitas to Widen Discussions on Social Exclusion in Professional Sports

Social exclusion is not a concept that is typically associated with professional athletes. As identified in this thesis, the traditional relationship between social exclusion and sport is one where participation in sport is used as a tool to decrease social exclusion (Spaaij, Magee, Jeanes 2012; Keller et al. 1998; Svoboda 1994; Collins et al. 1999; Best 1999). Related conversations address how certain segments of the population are excluded from sports participation (Messner 1990; Scraton 2002; Wellard 2009; Anderson 2005; Lucas

2000; Atchison 2007; Caudwell 2006; Miller and Wiggling 2004; Smith 2007; Carrington and McDonald 2001; Burdsey 2009; Gavrran 2005; Thomas and Smith 2009; Smith 2003; Nixon 2003; Hargreaves 2000; Fitzgerald 2005; Howe 2008; Armour 2000; Green and Roberts 2005; Gruneau 1999; Nicholson and Hoyer 2008; Collins and Buller 2003). Walker and Walker (1997:8) defined social exclusion as the:

Comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of the person in society.

The economic exclusion that this thesis addresses and which was identified by Walker and Walker only occurs as a result of professionalism. The amateur code of rugby union prohibited athletes from getting paid for performance, which thus required the player to have additional forms of employment. In other words, as a result of their amateur status, players had to have social and economic involvement outside of rugby union. Once the game became professional, the new structure decreased the player's social and economic networks. The new structure of professional rugby union demanded greater time than its amateur version, as has been suggested through the statement in Chapter Six by the Benevolent Fund's Board of Trustees and participating professional players. The increased focus on training and performance forced young men either to develop their education/skill training or begin a career in professional rugby. Those who elected to travel down the path of professional sport they openly accepted the sacrifices required to pursue such a career. The existing body of literature, along with the statements made by both the players and Board of Trustees in this thesis, confirms that a career in professional sport is uncertain and unpredictable. The level of unpredictability is amplified by the documented increase in

injury severity since the game transitioned into a professional format (Garraway et al. 2000, Brooks and Kemp 2008, Bathgate et al. 2002 and Kaplan et al. 2008). The danger of social exclusion for the professional athlete increased as a result of these combining factors. When young people are willing to sacrifice education and skill development to pursue a career that has a high level of uncertainty that is only increased by the risk of injury when that career comes to an end, those players have limited opportunities compared to those who have education or other employment qualifications. As a result of their participation in professional sports, athletes have made sacrifices which could affect their ability to fully participate in economic integration once their career is over. This is the danger point; as a result of the self-imposed sacrifices made by the players, their economic integration back into society is negatively impacted. If unable to integrate back into the job market, the athlete risks the dangers of becoming socially excluded.

Levitas provides a useful tool for developing an understanding of how social exclusion is understood within professional rugby union. It allows the data to uncover how player welfare policy is discussed amongst the RPA and rugby union players. By examining language through the lenses Levitas provides, we develop a social history of the unionisation of an entire industry and the evolution of how player welfare is understood by both the RPA and playing community. Applying Levitas to discourse in professional sport demonstrates a certain level of flexibility in her theoretical model since this is the first time such an application has been made. This application has contributed to the understanding of how and why the RPA was formed. Using Levitas's discursive framework also allows the data to explore how the RPA identified the need to protect current and future players from the risk of social exclusion. The data clearly shows that the RPA had identified social exclusion as a concern and consequently allowed their language to evolve in order to address this matter.

Applying Levitas's theories permitted me to document and understand the evolution of the RPA's language. For example, Levitas's classifications helped me to determine the tone and intended purpose of the RPA's Benevolent Fund. The fact that the main policy directive of the RPA's Benevolent Fund is the 'Life After Rugby' programme is significant evidence that the RPA is speaking and acting in a SID-dominant fashion. Without the use of Levitas, the research would not have been able to draw that conclusion. The application of Levitas's theoretical models is key to the research's contribution to a fuller understanding of how professional rugby players in England understand welfare programmes designed to reduce their risk of social exclusion.

Establishing the dominant discourse of the RPA allowed the research to develop a foundational understanding of player welfare/retirement preparation to compare against the data gathered from the professional rugby union players. Applying Levitas's discourse classifications to the statements made by the players allowed the research to determine whether the language of the RPA matches that of the playing community. The ability to use the pre-established classifications typically used to discuss social exclusion from a domestic policy perspective in a sport perspective only confirms this thesis's argument that professional athletes can be at risk of becoming socially excluded. Levitas not only explains how social exclusion is discussed, but she also legitimises the argument that social exclusion is a valid concern facing professional athletes.

The use of Levitas was critical in that it provided a framework that allowed the words of the players and directors to be usefully understood. Levitas's theory, along with the applied methodology, of phenomenography, allowed the research to develop an understanding of post-athletic retirement through the direct accounts of those involved. This combined force

of theory and methodology facilitated an achievement of the overall goal: to develop an understanding of the creation and purpose of the RPA's Benevolent Fund through a close examination of the shared language of those who are involved in the operation and procedures of the Benevolent Foundation. In order to provide that useful understanding, I used the methodological approach of phenomenography. Marton (1986:31) defined phenomenography as "a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them". Entwistle (1997) and Akerland (2005) contended that Phenomenographic research involves looking for the links that connect participants to phenomena that may be understood or perceived differently due to the diverse circumstances of those involved in a common action. The most commonly shared language and experiences amongst the participants become the 'outcome space', or the essence of the phenomenon. As this thesis aimed to discover how player welfare is conceptualised, perceived and understood from the many different perspectives of those involved, the methodological approach of phenomenography provided a firm foundation that allowed the aims of this thesis to be built. The use of Levitas's discourse models provided a pre-established and proven framework which allowed the Board of Trustees and player statements to be classified in order to assist in establishing how the shared concept of player welfare is conceptualised, perceived and understood by those who develop and use the policy. Further, the employment of Levitas allowed for 'true action' of phenomenography to occur. Marton (1986:33) articulated this as, "a careful account of the different way people think about phenomena may help uncover conditions that facilitate the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively 'better' perception of reality". Using Levitas highlighted the transition of thought of the RPA from providing no care, to the

adoption of a redistributive approach, to the current approach of investing in the athlete to provide opportunities for employment once a career in professional sport has been concluded. Applying Levitas as the examining lens allowed this research to identify the conditions that facilitated the transition in the policy and language used by both the RPA and the professional rugby union athlete.

From the results gathered in this thesis, the evolution of discourses players have used to describe welfare and retirement is clear. When the rugby union became professional in 1995, the players did not have any form of formal representation that was devoted to the protection of the players' interests. In essence, they were denied political integration into the professional format of English Rugby Union. As a result of not having formal representation on any of the boards or committees that regulated and oversaw the professional game, the new professional structure did not have formal welfare mechanisms in place to address the evolving needs of the players. It was not until three years later that this gap began to be addressed. The injury of Damian Hopley identified that player welfare was not being satisfactorily attended to. Dealing with his own frustrations, Hopley led the grassroots movement amongst the current playing community, highlighting the need for player representation. Once it was properly established, the RPA fought for the standardisation of player contracts and provisions for care during times of injury.

The early voice of the RPA promoted a concept of redistribution. This redistribution came as a result of the RPA ensuring the clubs and the RFU dedicated financial resources to welfare provisions. It also became its own tool for redistribution. Just like the 'Friendly Societies' which existed before the Beverage approach of care, the RPA would collect resources from their members and redistribute those resources to those who required care.

This form of horizontal redistribution provided care for the immediate welfare concerns; however, as the professional game matured, the rate of injury severity increased. Players who had forgone development opportunities started experiencing career ending injuries. One of the only resources available to address their financial concerns was the RPA. In an effort to protect themselves from providing long-term financial assistance, the RPA created the Benevolent Fund. A consequence was that player welfare discussion transitioned from RED to SID.

The existence of the social investment model and the dominant participation in SID language show that professional rugby players' desire programmes that will aid in their transition to additional employment once their career in rugby union is over. This willingness to participate in social investment programmes, such as 'Life After Rugby', shows a cognitive understanding for the need to prepare for a life after sport. Moreover, it uncovers a shared understanding by a majority of the playing community and the RPA about the need for welfare mechanisms in professional sport.

Regardless of this commonality, the data also identified a community of players who spoke in tones that could not be classified in the pre-existing structure of Levitas's typologies. As a result I created a fourth classification of NED. Finding this new classification illustrates that the welfare mechanisms of the RPA have not yet adequately reached their entire membership. It also demonstrates that Levitas's classifications fail to cover all types of social exclusion discourse.

While Levitas's models provide both the opportunity to identify an honest reflection of how policy is created and a reflection of how the policy is received, several critics have suggested her work fails to identify whether the presence of discourse models actually helps to



decrease social exclusion within the economic model of capitalism. For example, Byrne (2006: 128) contended that Levitas has not addressed the power relationship within the capitalistic market that results in exploitation. Byrne further argued that social exclusion is “a necessary and inherent characteristic” of capitalism. Byrne felt that Levitas’s failure to address the structural nature of capitalism is a weakness in her argument; he maintained that promoting paid employment as the solution to social exclusion is simply addressing a symptom of social exclusion rather than its structural cause. While this statement may be true, it is an unfair criticism of Levitas’s approach. The work of Levitas is not one of policy creation; rather, it exists to provide an examination of how policy is discussed. While Levitas’s models were traditionally used for classifying discourse, this thesis shows how her models can be employed in ‘real’ analysis of discourse. It is unlikely that Levitas intended her work to be used as a means to understand how player welfare and athletic retirement in professional rugby union is discussed. Nevertheless, her models can be applied as an analytic tool to provide insight into how policy is considered within the players’ association and the playing community. While her theory does not address the economic structure of capitalism or the power relationships within professional rugby union, it does provide an honest and ‘real world’ account of how welfare policy is discussed in that field.

Theoretically, an interesting result emerged as a potential addition to Levitas’s existing discourse classifications. RED, MUD and SID are verbal representations of particular ideologies regarding the best way to address social exclusion. Levitas assumes that those talking about ways of reducing social exclusion will engage in one of the three classifications. Chapter Seven identified that individuals who talk about welfare provisions and the reduction of social exclusion but who are devoid of explicit ideologies cannot be forced into a particular discourse paradigm. In other words, Levitas’s models *can* be useful,

but they fail to adequately provide an understanding of those who do not subscribe to a particular political ideology. Thus, they do not always present an honest account of the existing and potential views on a topic.

#### 8.5 How Players' Unions and Welfare Organizations and Professional Sports Might Benefit from the Research

This thesis is centrally concerned with post-athletic career provisions and the ways in which they are discussed in rugby union. Though the findings are specific to professional rugby union in England, the results can translate to other organizational structures. Several lessons can be learned from the research's results that can be beneficial to other professional sports organizations who are engaged in promoting post-athletic retirement preparation. First, narrating how the RPA was created and the steps they undertook to transition from a sport with no representation to a sport providing services that benefit their membership over the entire playing career is beneficial to rugby as well as to peer organizations that provide similar services. Second, the review of the literature uncovered several reports that acknowledged the need to provide holistic programmes and policies to address the transition process out of professional sport, yet there still remains a limited amount of research on the organizational structure and programmes which actually deliver the suggested policies. This thesis begins to address that deficit by telling the story of the RPA through their members' understanding of player welfare. The creation of the RPA'S Benevolent Fund not only shows an example of an organization that provides a 'start to finish' approach to player welfare, but the Fund also provides an articulation of how members understand and discuss policy. This research is an honest account of how the RPA responded to the concerns of the professional rugby player and continues to evolve in their

mission to reduce the risk of social exclusion as a result of participation in professional sport. The fact that the RPA can admit that their athletes can become victims of social exclusion is an important first step for any organization before they begin addressing player welfare issues. This thesis provides one of the first examinations of a structure of this type and the language members used to develop welfare mechanisms to reduce the risk of social exclusion within professional sport.

Like professional rugby, professional football places significant emphasis on developing players through the use of academy structures. The emphasis on cultivating talent at the earliest opportunity is supported by Spamer (2009) who argued for the benefits of identifying and developing athletic talent at younger ages. Unlike rugby union academies where 30 out of a 100 athletes make it to the professional level, roughly only one out of 100 makes it to the professional level of football (Mark Champion, Personal Interview, 3, October 2011). This means that the risk of social exclusion for a football player may occur much sooner than the rugby player, as the employment sacrifices made by the football player are less likely to actually result in a career in professional sport.

Third, this research could also benefit other sports with high rates of physical contact that can impact the longevity of a career. For example, American football careers, like rugby careers, can be shortened by injury. Torres (2009) reported in *Sports Illustrated* that one in every two professional players in the National Football League (NFL) will average only a three-year career as a professional athlete. This means that roughly half of all those who are extended a contract in the NFL will only be a professional athlete for 36 months. This statistic, combined with the fact that 78% of retired NFL players either declare bankruptcy or experience some form of financial stress within two years of their retirement from

professional sport (Torres 2009), suggests that a serious discussion needs to be had regarding preparation for retirement from the NFL. The RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund could serve as a model for the NFL since the former already encourages their athletes to engage in greater SID-style language. If the NFL likewise promoted this discourse, athletes in American football might be empowered to develop a better contingency plan for when their career on the gridiron is complete.

While the creation story of the RPA is unique, the purpose for their creation is not. The motive for the birth of the RPA mirrors many organizations whose mission is to protect a particular segment of the population that is being underserved or exploited and requires an additional level of protection. While it may be difficult to see the professional athlete as a sympathetic character since many receive exorbitant amounts of money to play a game, a great majority of professional athletes will require employment once their time as a professional athlete is over. Identified throughout this thesis is the fact that a career in professional sport is uncertain and unpredictable; therefore, the need for athletes to create a contingency plan is necessary. The need for a contingency plan is increased in sports with high levels of injury for the obvious reason that the certainty of a career decreases with the greater likelihood of injury. Additionally professional athletes do not have the ability to choose who they work for. Athletes are drafted, sold and traded by the management without concern for the individual. One tool the athlete does have is the ability to use their collective bargaining rights to negotiate for better playing environments that include player welfare and injury protection provisions.

The results from this thesis suggest that professional rugby union athletes are not solely concerned with the redistributive nature of care. While at one time players were satisfied

with receiving medical care or receiving financial assistance during times of hardship, the findings of this thesis are that players want the ability to provide for themselves once their career as a professional athlete is over. One way to offer that opportunity is to promote SID-inspired programmes and provide training and education to the athletes in preparation for the inevitable transition into post-athletic life. The results of this research suggest that athletes will participate in programmes that provide opportunities for skill development that may allow for greater employment opportunities once their career in sport is over. The RPA's Benevolent Fund's 'Life After Rugby' programme is entrenched in SID language and provides an example of an organization working to provide welfare provision to their athletes that allows them to re-engage with society once they leave the world of professional rugby union.

## 8.6 Conclusion

The application of Levitas in the context of social exclusion of sport has only been used once prior to my research. Spaaij, Magee and Jeanes (2012) employed Levitas's theory as an analytic lens for comparing the discourse patterns of several programmes that use sport as a tool to increase employability with 'at-risk groups'. However, the work of Spaaij, Magee and Jeanes (2012) falls into traditional track of sports exclusion literature of sport as a tool to address social exclusion while my research uses Levitas to explore social exclusion that results from the participation in elite level sports. My research provides a first-hand account of how the RPA's discourse on social exclusion impacts the welfare programmes offered to their membership. The employment of Levitas's theoretical lens in this research not only allowed the research to identify the current approach of the RPA, but it also allowed the research to document the evolution of language used by the organization.

Being able to chart the historical dialogue of the RPA helps to establish an appreciation of the social history of the organization and how their understanding of welfare/ player retirement preparation and language changed over time. The examination of the Board of Directors' language also provides an insight into the current action of welfare policy within professional rugby union. The application of Levitas also allows for the language of the participating players to be examined, which in turn establishes how the players understand player welfare. Moreover, it helps to determine whether the action of the RPA matches the policy desires of their membership.

This thesis found that the effectiveness of the RPA's promotion of their programmes amongst the current playing community is varied. The data reveals a clear line of division between those players who subscribe to the retirement preparation plans promoted by the RPA and those players who do not. There is also strong relationship between the amount of time spent/experience as a professional player and his attitude towards retirement preparation. The data shows that players who have greater experience as a professional athlete echo the language of the RPA and openly embrace and participate in the development opportunities offered by the RPA. Current retirement research supports the observation that professional athletes, like individuals in other professions, start to consider retirement options as they mature in their career. The RPA's promotion and provision of programmes to assist in the transition allows the athlete to engage in retirement preparation more easily than if he was left to his own devices. Since the dominant discourse of the participating players was SID-influenced, one can conclude that the RPA does have an effect on the retirement preparation of professional rugby players. However, the data also shows that the RPA needs to adjust their current approach towards younger players if they

want players with less career experience to embrace and participate in the SID-driven programme of 'Life After Rugby'.

Table 7.1 in Chapter Seven showed that the overall majority of players' comments on player welfare (51%) revealed a SID tone. This data establishes that either the RPA has been effective in communicating their message about retirement preparation to the playing community or that the RPA has been responsive in addressing their members' concerns about employment opportunities post playing career. Regardless, whether the provisions provided by the RPA is a response to or the cause of the language, the fact remains that the welfare provisions of the RPA are congruent with the policy desires of the RPA membership. The players specifically addressed networking and skill development opportunities as desirable policy components. Both of these components are actions which are offered by the RPA and facilitated by the Development Manager to professional rugby union players in the English Premiership. Throughout each season the RPA provides networking opportunities which allow players to meet representatives from surrounding corporations. This has led to apprenticeship and employment opportunities. The Development Manager also works directly with players to help with specific skill development and job placement. While the RPA and a majority of the participating players share a policy understanding, there is a minority 'hard to reach' voice that does not participate either in the shared practices of the RPA or the dominant understanding or retirement preparation of the player community.

This 'hard to reach' community are the players who have just started a career in professional rugby union or are within the first three to four years of their career. Chapter Seven identified that all of the participating players who had five or fewer years of

experience spoke about player welfare and specifically retirement preparation in a tone of non-engagement, which this research refers to as NED. This segment of the playing community is difficult to reach as they are not naïve about or unaware of the dangers of a career in rugby; rather, they simply choose not to be proactive about retirement preparation, an attitude that presents an obstacle for the RPA. The attitude expressed by those in the infancy of their career is not unlike the position taken by most young people when speaking about retirement preparation. However, the professional athlete has significantly less time to evolve in thought and start their retirement process, thus making it very important to assist them in shifting their stance as soon as possible. One of the most possible effective tools at the RPA's disposal is their own membership. As this chapter suggested, the RPA could leverage the influence of the more senior players to encourage their juniors to embrace the need to take advantage of the RPA's development programmes. This would echo the actions of key players in the late 1990's who urged their fellow players to consider the importance of a players' association.

The examination in this thesis of how the RPA and professional rugby union athletes speak about player welfare has allowed me to address in this chapter the ways in which Levitas's discursive models have been able to contribute to the data; further, I have had the opportunity to identify the limitations of her approach. This chapter also allowed for a discussion about the effectiveness of the RPA's policy on the current playing community, elements of practice and how the RPA may better encourage 'hard to reach' players to begin preparing for a life outside professional rugby.



## **Chapter 9:**

### **Conclusion**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

This research has developed an understanding of how ‘welfare’, with a specific concern for post-athletic retirement preparation, is discussed and understood by the RPA’s Benevolent Fund’s Board of Directors and by professional rugby union athletes in England. Through the use of phenomenography and Levitas’s discourse classification this thesis has presented an honest account of how this research has achieved the aims set out at the beginning of this thesis: i) to establish an understanding about the creation of the RPA’s Benevolent Fund; ii) to examine how the RPA’s Benevolent Fund and professional playing community speak about welfare/retirement preparation and iii) to consider what potential contributions the RPA’s Benevolent Fund can make to the debate about how charities can participate in welfare deficit.

This chapter will re-introduce the notion of the Quad-lemma and how the adoption of professionalism allowed the elite rugby player to become an ‘at-risk’ group for social exclusion. The chapter will also re-state how the RPA’s Benevolent Fund was established and how the operational tone evolved from one of redistribution to one of social investment as the organization matured. The chapter will conclude by identifying areas of future research as well as the limitations of this research.

## 9.2 The Plight of the Professional Rugby Player

The elite level athlete is not typically considered an 'at-risk' group for social exclusion. As a rule, the general public tends to think of professional athletes as a group of privileged individuals who, because of their athletic ability, have above-average access to fame and fortune. As with most stereotypes, this is a generalization, and it has prevented individuals from viewing professional/elite level athletes sympathetically. Elite level athletes face employment issues and retirement difficulties just like individuals in every other employment sector. In the case of professional rugby union in England, very few players will obtain the financial freedom required to retire fully from working life. A great majority of those who play the professional game will need to acquire another form of employment once their career as a professional athlete has concluded. Moreover, they will need to begin making retirement preparations early in their profession since, as this thesis has identified, a career in professional sport is uncertain and unpredictable. Unlike traditional professions where long-term plans can be made, the life span of a professional is difficult to gauge, meaning the need to start preparing for the inevitable transition to another career needs to begin early; if it does not, an athlete can run the risk of entering a job market with limited skills and education. It is for these reasons the RPA dominantly speaks in SID tones when discussing player welfare and retirement preparation, as this thesis has identified.

When rugby union transitioned to a professional format in 1995, the game experienced a significant operational and social change. The elite level of the game was no longer filled with university educated professionals who if/ when they were injured simply returned to

their offices. With the IRB's decision to turn rugby union into a professional sport, playing rugby union became a stand-alone career path. As this thesis has argued, that decision created an arms race to acquire the best talent, in order to ensure commercial success. In the effort to do so, clubs adopted an academy structure with the goal of identifying and training boys and young men at earlier ages to develop high performance players. As a result of rugby becoming a stand-alone career and the creation of the rugby academy, athletes took to training full-time to ensure their place in the professional game. This resulted in players being bigger, faster and stronger. The increase in the size and power of the professional player translated into greater injury severity and more players being forced to retire because of injury.

While rugby union was successful in creating mechanisms to develop talent in the professional game, they were not so successful in creating mechanisms to help usher players out of the professional game. The story of Damian Hopley highlights the RFU's inability and/or unwillingness to assist him during his experience with a career ending injury. As a result of the RFU's failure to act, Hopley, fuelled by his frustrations, created the RPA in 1998. The RPA, like many trade unions, was created out of the need to protect the employee and to ensure a level of representation to prevent the exploitation within the work environment. The first effort of the newly established organization was to create a standardised contract ensuring a consistent level of player protection across the Premiership. As the game matured and injury started to affect the players' only source of income, the RPA identified the need to provide mechanisms to assist in times of illness and/or hardship. However, it was the injury of Andrew Blyth in 2000 that highlighted the remaining limitations of welfare programmes existing in the professional game.

Consequently, the RPA established the Benevolent Fund in 2001 to address the evolving welfare needs of the player. The RPA's Benevolent Fund's approach to welfare also evolved as the game matured. Originally, the RPA only occupied the redistributive model of welfare, but as the RPA and playing community perceived injury induced retirement to be a growing problem, they adopted a more social investment approach, resulting in the SID-based 'Life After Rugby' programme.

The interviews with Damian Hopley and the Foundation's Board of Directors in this research have provided readers with a first-hand account of how player welfare evolved during the transition from an amateur game to professional sport. Through their descriptions, the research was able to identify a failure in the new professional structure to meet the perceived needs of the newly created professional rugby union player. Their descriptions also led this research to be able to identify how new concerns emerged for the RPA to address as the game continued to mature. The increase in injury severity and the rise in career ending injuries prompted the RPA to recognise the need to provide additional levels of protection. The result was the creation of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, which introduced a new level of protection and care to the professional athlete.

### 9.3 The Tone of Welfare Discourse in Professional Rugby Union

The interviews that were gathered from the Foundation's Board of Directors highlighted the original intent of the Foundation, which was to provide financial redistribution to players who were in need of assistance. As the professional game matured, the Foundation's Board of Directors started to see the need to expand the services of the Foundation from solely a redistributive function to one that also included a social investment package. The transition was aided by the Board of Directors identifying elements of the Quad-lemma and revealed

how the current structure can result in a player becoming socially excluded. The Board's understanding of the need to prepare for retirement was strongly evident in the analysis of their transcripts. The Board of Directors unmistakably utilise the SID approach when discussing welfare provisions and player retirement. The Board's emphasis on the 'Life After Rugby' programme, which stresses preparation through developing skills and education, is a textbook example of Levitas's SID approach.

Through the use of Levitas's theory, the data was also able to show that the playing community is divided on the subject of preparing for a life after rugby. The data identified that players who are at the beginning of their career are less likely to be concerned about preparing for retirement. This finding is not atypical, as research indicates that most retirement preparation occurs towards the end of one's career. While the data identified that players who are within the first four years of their career do not engage in retirement preparation, it also uncovered that those who have played five or more years in professional rugby speak predominantly in SID tones. This finding indicates that a change in attitude towards retirement preparation occurs as they mature in their role as a professional athlete and start to gauge their own career span – a recognition that complements studies introduced in the Discussion Chapter. This finding shows that certain athletes are willing to prepare and the programmes offered by RPA are being utilised. However, with a career in professional sport, the life span is unpredictable and injury can hasten retirement. The fact that most players are not preparing in the first three years of their career shows that the RPA is failing to encourage early preparation, leaving the athlete still at risk of becoming socially excluded. As such, this thesis has also provided several suggestions which may assist in the earlier adoption of an attitude that embraces preparing for retirement.

## 9.4 Important Practical and Theoretical Findings

### 9.4.1 Practical Findings

The most important practical finding this thesis has presented is that professional rugby union players who are in the first four years of their contract are not taking advantage of retirement preparation mechanisms offered to them by the RPA. This finding is extremely valuable to the Board of Directors of the RPA's Benevolent Fund, as it identifies that their current policy fails to catch their younger members. What is concerning about this finding is that this younger segment of the professional playing community is not naïve to the issue of injury and the need to prepare for retirement. Throughout the interview process with this segment of the playing community, the interviewees articulated an awareness of injury and the need to prepare for retirement; however, they also expressed that retirement preparation was something that was not a current concern for them, stating rather that it was a topic to be addressed later in their career. This is dangerous, as it has been established by Roderick (2006a) and McGillivray et al. (2005) that a career in professional sport is uncertain. Unlike traditional employment, the professional athlete does not have an identifiable track for advancement. In other words, what a player has to do to maintain his status or to be promoted is less defined than it would be on a traditional career track.

Injury is also an issue that this thesis has identified as a significant concern facing the life span of a career in professional rugby union. At any moment a player's career can come to an end. This thesis has provided the examples of Hopley, Blyth, Hampson, Todd, Castrogiovanni, Buist and the Tait brothers to illustrate how a career in professional sport is fleeting. In doing so, it has highlighted the importance of developing an additional set of skills outside of rugby to aid in the transition to another form of paid employment. The

result would be a decrease in the number of athletes at risk of becoming socially excluded. The existence of injury and the increase in injury severity only makes the need for players to actively engage in the retirement process all that more important. Yet, unlike the senior players who do prepare for retirement, those athletes who are within the first four years of their professional career do not engage in the same level of involvement. This lack of planning places the athlete at risk of becoming socially excluded. The RPA should therefore place greater emphasis on tactics that will ensure that younger players engage in retirement efforts earlier. With a retirement plan in place, the athlete will be in a more advantageous position if and when he needs to seek alternative employment.

#### 9.4.2 Theoretical Findings

This thesis has contributed to the existing body of literature about social exclusion in relation to sport and has helped to evolve the theoretical application of Levitas's discourse classifications in sport-related research.

As this thesis has identified in Chapter Four, social exclusion in sociology of sport literature typically falls into one of two categories. The first is that sport is used as a tool to overcome social exclusion for at-risk groups. The concept behind this particular policy approach is that sport, among other boons, inspires self-confidence and teamwork and builds community. As such, it is believed to help the at-risk community overcome exclusionary behaviour. The second category relates to exclusion from the participation of sport. This exclusion can be the result social/economic factors, gender, race, religion, sexuality and regional location, among others.

This research has examined the issue of social exclusion as the result of participation in elite level athletics, which is unique in the existing body of relevant literature. As this thesis has

argued, because of the sacrifices made by those who compete at the highest levels of competitive rugby, athletes place themselves in a position that may result in social exclusion if they do not take measures to develop additional skills or education that would allow them to acquire different employment once their career as a professional athlete is complete. If an athlete has taken advantage of the RPA's services in developing additional skill sets and networking opportunities, when the athlete chooses – or is forced to – retire, he has greater opportunity to acquire another form of paid employment, thus decreasing his risk of social exclusion. In presenting this argument, this research has introduced a third category of literature on the topic of sport-related social exclusion.

The use of Levitas's discourse classifications in the arena of sport is also novel. This work has provided one of the few uses of Levitas's theory to examine social exclusion within a sport context. Spaaij, Magee and Jeane (2012) used Levitas's classifications framework in their research on sport as an intervening tool in youth employment programmes in Rotterdam and Stokes-on-Trent. The application of Levitas in Spaaij, Magee and Jeane's (2012) research, as well as in this research, shows that Levitas's classification structure is relevant to issues of exclusion in sport. However, this research has identified a weakness in Levitas's existing classification structure. Levitas's classifications assume that participants will participate ideologically in relevant discourse. By contrast, this research has shown that not all discourse of social exclusion is one of engagement. The discovery and creation of NED in this thesis shows that there are potentially other forms of discourse. So, not only has this research demonstrated that Levitas's classifications are relevant and can expand in application, but it has also identified a gap in Levitas's existing classification and has provided a fourth discourse classification option.



By examining the language of the RPA and the professional athlete, this thesis has explored the plight of the professional rugby player. It has provided an explanation for the creation of the RPA's Benevolent Fund and has identified how player welfare, with specific concern for post-athletic retirement preparation, is discussed and understood by the RPA and professional players. Like most exploratory research, the final product has produced more questions than answers. The following section will identify several areas of future research for which this work can serve as a foundation.

### 9.5 Future Research

Additional research could be conducted on organizations that provide similar functions to other professional athletes to determine if the organization and the organization's members share a common understanding of the purpose and action of player welfare policy.

Specifically, I am drawn to the research conducted by Drawer and Fuller (2002) who identified a significant dissatisfaction within the membership of the Professional Footballers Association. The PFA has identified the need to assist in the promotion of developing a skill sets and/or vocational paths for players once they leave their professional athletic career. Pat Lally, who leads the educational programmes for the PFA as the Head of Education, uses SID-style language when he engages in the subject:

Players need to ensure they have every base covered and it does take the pressure off when you're playing on a Saturday to know you've got qualifications under your belt. You know you've got the qualification to hopefully get a decent job and a decent career once your playing days are over (Drawer and Fuller, 2002: 37)

Using Levitas to analyse Lally's statement, one sees he employs a SID tone, as he promotes the concept of gaining skills and qualifications which would allow a football player to acquire employment once his professional football career is over. However, unlike the results revealed in this thesis, where the Rugby Players' Association and the professional rugby union player share a language and understanding regarding player welfare, there is a divorce in the collective understanding between the PFA and its membership. As identified in the literature review chapter, Drawer and Fuller (2002) investigated the support programmes that professional footballers receive from the PFA. Drawer and Fuller identified that the PFA's efforts in successfully meeting their members' expectations of player welfare was unsatisfactory. Drawer and Fuller's research specifically identified a substantial level of dissatisfaction regarding the education of footballers and provisions for their welfare. Drawer and Fuller contended that 81% of those who participated in their study were not satisfied with the education and welfare services they were provided during their time as a professional football player:

The inadequacies identified in the provision of injury prevention support services at UK professional soccer clubs have been supported by the views expressed by retired professional soccer players in this survey. This has important implications for the UK professional soccer industry because health and safety legislation requires to identify hazards and risks arising from their work activities and to provide appropriate information and training about the risks. At present, players are inadequately informed about the health risk arising from a career in professional soccer and the control measures to reduce these risks... Without a strategy for providing adequate long term assistance for players forced to retire through injury, the soccer industry

remains open to the possibility of litigation from players seeking financial redress for loss of income. (Drawer and Fuller, 2002: 37)

A possible reason for the high levels of player dissatisfaction which Drawer and Fuller (2002) discovered could be the result of the service providers (PFA) and the service users (PFA Membership) using different language to discuss player welfare. It could be beneficial for the PFA to conduct a similar study to this thesis in order to establish the dominantly-used language by the two parties. Establishing how the PFA and professional footballers talk about player welfare could help develop a clearer understanding of each party's expectations. The data from the PFA would be compared with the data of the PFA membership to identify schisms between them. Once any gaps have been identified, the PFA could either educate their membership on what they should expect from their player welfare policy or change the PFA policy to match the desires of the professional playing community. The possible lack of understanding of each other's expectations can breed frustration and a perception of failure. If the PFA could identify the dominant discourse for their own policies through the use of Levitas's classifications, they might be able to become better service providers by allowing the service users to have a clearer understanding of what they offer. Further, their services could be enhanced if they had a better understanding of where they may be failing to provide desired services. Establishing how the professional footballer and the PFA discuss player welfare could provide a foundation for building a bridge between the two parties that would result in greater satisfaction in the organization's policy.

An obvious area for further is the NED approach, the newly-identified discourse used by players in their first several years of their professional career. Developing a better

understanding of why a player who has just started his career as a professional athlete is less likely to engage in retirement preparation discussion is important for those who provide player protection. Discovering the trigger or triggers that makes a player start participating in retirement preparation could be a critical piece of information for the RPA to develop a more effective programme. Being able to usher athletes into retirement preparation sooner only increases the likelihood that the player will have taken precautions for retirement when it occurs. The greater the preparation, the less likely the player is to experience social exclusion.

The most evident area for investigation is how player welfare is discussed in other countries in the Northern Hemisphere. An identical study could be conducted with RPA peer organizations in Britain such as the Scottish Professional Rugby Players Association and the Welsh Rugby Players Association, to establish if similar discourse participation of SID and NED exists within the Scottish and Welsh trade unions and professional playing community. The study could also be extended the Southern Hemisphere to determine if there is a shared understanding about player welfare amongst the Tier One Rugby Nations<sup>36</sup>. The research could also involve the International Rugby Board to establish if there is a global understanding of how player welfare is understood and discussed. The extended research would establish the difference and similarities which exist in providing care for the professional rugby union athlete. From a policy perspective, it could help establish a global 'best practices', allowing an identification of the best way to provide care for athletes.

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<sup>36</sup> England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina.

This thesis has identified the finding that players in their first four years of their contract do not prepare for career ending alternatives. Building on this finding, additional research could focus on those players who use a NED tone to determine what, if anything, can be done to promote an earlier adoption of the RPA's 'Life After Rugby' programme. The research could investigate if there are potential structural or behavioural modifications that could be implemented to quicken the player's participation in development programmes.

The current research could also be expanded to look at the role of social class and life stage of the player's retirement preparation plans. Collins (2009: 98) pointed out that rugby union has the reputation of being a sport played by the privileged. He argued that, "It is a generally accepted truth that English rugby union is largely a 'middle class game'". Hopley and Barnes also provided several examples of how the pre-professional days of rugby union were filled with university educated professionals. This thesis identified that before the transition to professionalism, if a player was injured and no longer able to play they would simply return to their professional career. Both Collins and Hopley indicated a change in the class structure with the transition to professionalism. Collins (2009: 129) addressed how professionalism effected the social association with rugby union and how professionalism may have decreased the rugby club's role in middle-class sociability. He wrote,

"The club may no longer play the important role in the middle-class social networks that it once did. Moreover, this transformation of the rugby club was accelerated with the introduction of professionalism in 1995, as leading clubs became businesses and profitability replaced sociability as the guiding principles. As rugby metamorphosed from the freemasonry into an entertainment, the importance of class remained yet the club, its traditional conduit, was in decline. "(Collins p.129).

Collins is contending that, while rugby is still a middle class interest, the operational purpose of 'the club' has changed. The professional club is more interested in performance outcomes, a transition that made clubs look for talent regardless of the socio-economic background of the player. In short, rugby may still be a middle class interest but those who occupy the playing sphere may not be exclusively 'middle class', which it tended to be in the past. In interview, Hopley provided further evidence of how the social composition of the rugby club locker room has changed since the transition to a professional format:

When I was playing you would have Doctors, Lawyers, students, dentists all in the same room ... most who have been public school educated , University educated, and on and on and on. Now you have guys who are 18, not going to University so it is bit of a generalization, but half the players are in higher education than 10 -15 years ago. (Damian Hopley, Personal Interview. Personal Interview. 19 March 2012).

Hopley describes how the locker room has changed from being comprised of a group of educated professionals who happen to play rugby to athletes who play rugby professionally. This is a significant change in the composition of the professional playing community. It would be worth further research to investigate how the transition to a professional format has affected the socio-economic landscape of the professional rugby playing community. Are those who are currently playing at a professional level coming from traditional 'middle class' back grounds? Has professionalism provided an avenue for those who are from a working class background to enter the ranks of elite rugby? This is important in the welfare discussion as it shows that current players may not have the family financial resources to help during time of injury, thus the need for retirement preparation is all that more important. The current data did not examine socio-economic back ground of participating

players, which theoretically could impact on how players understand welfare and more specifically player welfare. Future work could examine the current class makeup within the playing community, which could provide greater insight into discourse patterns occurring within the playing community.

Another area that needs to be researched further is the issue of career and life stages. In Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine, the data identified that players with great playing experience were more likely to speak in SID tones as well as take advantage of the RPA's 'Life After Rugby' programme. What the data do not reflect is the current life stage that particular athletes occupy. Coulter (1983) identified that current life factors also affect how an athlete addresses the issue of retirement. These factors can include age, gender and race of the athlete as well as any health and financial issues the athlete may be facing at the time of retirement. Also the existing support systems, (friends, families, professional services) the athlete has access to can affect the transition process. The data did not specifically examine the age of the player, if the player was married, if the player had children, if the player had other financial responsibilities such as caring for siblings and or parent(s) or what other support systems the athlete had access to outside of the RPA . One could argue that investigating further the life stage of an athlete could affect their orientation to, and how an athlete speaks about, retirement preparation. It would be worth further examination to determine whether players who spoke in NED, RED and SID also shared similar life stages.

While this research has provided a description of how the RPA and the RPA's Benevolent Fund came into existence as well as an analysis of how they speak about player welfare mechanisms to address the risk of social exclusion, it has not identified whether or not the commonly shared language of the Foundation's Board of Directors and professional players is the most effective approach for accomplishing the organization's goal. In short, even though both parties employ SID-dominant tones, there is no evidence that the SID approach produces a reduction in social exclusion. To determine if the SID-dominant discourse of both parties actually renders the desired outcomes, further research needs to be conducted on players who have and have not participated in the development programmes. This will determine if there is any difference in the transition process between those who have participated and those who have not. If quantitative results can show a measurable difference in the employment opportunities between those who do participate in development programmes and those who do not, the RPA's dominate SID language will then be shown to be effective for reducing the risk of social exclusion.

#### 9.6 Limitations of the Research

While the research has attempted to effectively expose how welfare mechanisms regarding retirement preparation are discussed within the RPA and the professional playing community, it has not determined if the dominant language expressed by the RPA and players actually translates into effective policies for reducing social exclusion. The research has not established that promoting the SID-based 'Life After Rugby' programme has actually decreased the social exclusion of professional rugby players in England. The literature review identified several government documents promoting SID-driven programmes as



effective policy measures for addressing social exclusion; however, there is no evidence in this thesis to suggest that SID-based programmes are actually effective.

While promoting education and skill development may provide for a more ‘well-rounded’ athlete, doing so does not guarantee that a player will be able to secure a job after he leaves professional sport. Regardless of the discourse – SID, MUD, RED or otherwise – one uses to discuss mechanisms that reduce the impact of social exclusion, the promotion of a discourse does not necessarily translate into results. Championing a specific discourse cannot on its own change the economic environment or create a surplus of jobs for players who are in need of one. In order to determine if the adoption of SID-based programmes actually aids in career transition for the former rugby player, more research would need to be conducted.

### 9.7 Concluding Statement

This research has presented an honest account of how the RPA’s Benevolent Fund Board of Directors and players within the professional level of English rugby union discuss player welfare. It has placed a specific emphasis on post-athletic retirement preparation. Using the purposefully-selected methodology of phenomenography, I was able to use the statements of the RPA’s Board of Directors to describe why the RPA and Benevolent Fund was created and to articulate the purpose of their organization, based on their own perceptions. All of the Board members spoke in SID-dominant tones but recognised their RED dominant tones of the earlier ages of the RPA. This evolution in thought and action shows that the Foundation is actively responding to the changes in the perceived needs of the professional player. The Board of Directors recognised the emergence of the ‘Quad-lemma’ and moved to mitigate the possible impacts of social exclusion. This research also examined the playing community to gauge whether the RPA’s message was being positively received and

accepted by its members. Again using the approach of phenomenography, I was able to describe the players' perception of the RPA's policy. The players' response was mixed; those with greater work/ playing experience shared the Board's views while players within the first four years were not all that interested in planning for retirement.

This finding is significant from a theoretical standpoint as it shows that the retirement planning of professional athletes is not very different from other professionals who also put off planning for retirement until a later stage in their career. The data is interesting from a practical standpoint as well because it provides the RPA with useful data from which they may be able to work on encouraging the retirement preparation for those players who are in the infancy of their career. The data has shown that the RPA's SID message is being well received by those players with five or more years of professional experience but not by those who are within the first four years of their professional rugby career. From this data, the Board of Directors may be able to adjust their approach so as to encourage earlier adoption of retirement preparation. If players start developing skills and education more quickly, they will forge an alternative track that will make their transition out of professional sport smoother and more satisfying. More importantly, they will sidestep the risk of unemployment and social exclusion.

## **Appendix 1 -**

### **Player Interview Questions – Semi-Structured:**

The research employed a semi-structured interview strategy. The question listed below sets out a sequence of queries which were loosely followed during the interview process to gain an understanding of how professional rugby union players in England comprehend the topic of player welfare and the work of the RPA's Benevolent Fund.

**Part A: Purpose of this group of this questioning was to gain an understanding of how aware the athlete was with the RPA and the RPA Benevolent Fund.**

- How long have you been playing professional Rugby?
- Are you a member of the RPA?
- What made you want to join or not join?
- Are you aware of the services the RPA provide?
- Are you aware of the Benevolent Fund?
- Are you aware of the programmes offered to you from the Benevolent Fund?

**Part B: Purpose of this group of this questioning was to gain an understanding of how aware the athlete was of current welfare mechanisms.**

- What is your understanding of welfare?
- What is your understanding of player welfare? (Is there a difference?)
- Compared to other clubs how does your club rank in addressing welfare issues?
- What is the biggest threat facing the current professional rugby player?
- Is there any difference that you are aware of between how welfare was addressed in pre-professional to post professional rugby?
- Have you taken advantage of any of the programs that are offered through the BF or RPA?

- Do you know of anyone that has taken advantage of any of the programs that are offered through the BF or RPA?

**Part C: Purpose of this group of questioning was discover if the language of the Board was a correct representation of the concerns of the player.**

- Do you feel as a player, that the RPA adequately represents the concerns and needs of the professional rugby player?
- You do you personally feel represented?
- Did or Do you feel the academy structure has created a level of isolation from other opportunities (school/skill development)?
- Do you think the structure of professional rugby prohibits developing other skills for future employment opportunities?

If so, is that recognized by you/players/club/RFU?

Do you think a balance can be created allowing for both training and skill development?

- What is your understanding of the RPA's 'Life After Rugby' programme?
- Is the RPA addressing the 'real' welfare concerns that you/players face?

If so - how?

If not – why?

(What would be your/ player perspective of the RFU approach?)

- Can you tell me of how you are preparing for your retirement from the professional game?  
If not, explore why.
- RPA uses the expression 'Life After Rugby' in their literature and language, what does that mean to you?
- Any thoughts or feelings you would like to express about player welfare?

### **Board of Director Interview Questions – semi-structured:**

The research employed a semi-structured interview strategy. The question listed below sets out a sequence of queries which were loosely followed during the interview process to gain an understanding from the RPA's Benevolent Fund's Board of Directors on how the Benevolent Fund came about as well as how they provide mechanisms of care for professional rugby union players.

#### **Part A: Purpose of this group of this questioning was to gain an understanding of how the Board of Director become a part of the RPA's Benevolent Fund.**

- How did you first get first get started with the Benevolent Fund?
- How long have you been a Board Member?
- What do you feel is your function within the organization?
- What do you feel is the Benevolent Funds Function is within the RPA?
- What do you feel is the Benevolent Fund's Function within professional rugby union?
- What was the transition from an amateur format to a professional format like?

What was the transition like?

Was there any difference of when the clubs were owned by committee opposed to one individual owner, did the switch change how player welfare was address?

#### **Part B: Purpose of this group of questioning was to gain an understating of how the Board of Directors understood the issue of welfare.**

- How do you define player welfare, what does it mean to you?
- How does the work of the Benevolent Fund provide player welfare?
- What would happen to players when they got injured?
- Did the idea of player welfare change when the game went professional?

If yes, what caused the changes in understanding?

If yes, how did that effect the actions of the RPA/Benevolent Fund?

- With Rugby becoming professional late, do you think that has aided or hurt addressing the issue of welfare?
- A lot of the language the foundation uses includes injury and welfare, is that conscious effort?
- Rugby World Magazine stated that 20 players were forced to retire this year because of injury. What does that mean? What is the reaction to that from the perspective of the RPA?

**Part C: Purpose of this group of questioning was to connect the idea of player welfare to the work of the Benevolent Fund.**

- Was the Benevolent Fund apart of the original plan, or did it evolve out of something?
- What type of welfare mechanizes existed prior to the creation of the Benevolent Fund?
- How does the Benevolent Fund fit into the overall picture of the RPA? Current and future?
- What do you see that as one of the major missions of the Benevolent Fund?
- Any particular stories come to mind about the Benevolent Fund – success or challenges?
- What is the future of the Benevolent Fund?

## **Appendix 2: Board of Director Interview Sample**

Sample of Interview with Damian Hopley, one of two interviews:

Subject: Hopley, Damian

CEO and Founder of Rugby Players Association

Location: RPA Headquarters

Items of note: Meeting was originally scheduled for 30 minutes; interview lasted an hour and a half.

### **How did this all get created? What started this all?**

It was very much a personal thing from my playing days back in 1996. I was captain of the England 7's team in Hong Kong and was focusing on 7s that year. I went to Hong Kong. And on the bus on the way to the airport we were given some forms to sign, which ultimately turned out to be disclaimers, "hey guys just sign these" so we signed them and turned them back in. at the tournament playing in Scotland I suffered a savvier knee injury . The first issues was to get myself right get myself repaired. When I went to the RFU the advice and support was not particularly forthcoming but eventually .... There was a since that I had been dropped like a stone. I was like who should I go and see do we have a specialist, who is the knee guy, who is the right guy to go see. Eventually they came up with a chap up in Worcester who I went up to see. Yeah so when up to see him he did a scan, he did a scope and ascertained the antiracial ligament in my right knee was partial torn but should be ok, my meniscus was ruptured, my lateral meniscus, but I should be ok. So on the back of that advice I had about five months of Physio and in the interim I had lost out on a significant chunk of my earnings from Wasps. I was paying my medical bills, again when I went to the Rugby Union I was like can you help, here is my medical bills, plus I think I lost about £60,000 and they said no, you signed something on the bus and the way to the airport which absolutely

indemnifies us, yeah you are on your own. I was ooh I am the captain of the country how can I be abandoned like this. So it was kind of born out of this frustration and still trying to get fit again. So come October same year back on the field of play got another knock, knee did not feel good had another scan, the partial torn ACL and gone completely so it was a full rupture. So um ahh at this stage I am racking up quite significant medical bills and quite a bit loss of income. To be fair WASPs looked after me fairly well. They gave me physical therapy support put me on a contract all be it a much reduced one because I was not able to perform, and then I started to get interested in the idea of a players associations. Really bizarrely how life works out I was watching a film one day while icing my knee at home called "net matters" it was about the formation of the ice hockey players association. It was one of the many thing that got me started thinking why is there not - there was not an organization at the time in rugby that was effective. So I started meeting with the Cricket player's association meet to the footballers, laterally more the PCA than cricket. Over the next 18 months while I was trying to get fit again. I was doing other things I was not sitting idle, but I kept coming back to this focus of a players association, we need something that is a strong representative and unified. So in Aug on 1998, without any funding, which I regret, I would have done it slightly different now, but without any funding I literally drove around the country, got in my car and spoke to all the players, we need something here I am probably the best guy to do it A) I have been through this personal injustice of player contract and secondly I think I am bright I know the sport I know business I use to work in the city I think I can do this. And I actually thought I would do it for a year and a half then go back into the city. Here I am 13 years later I actually thought I would set this thing up, it would be a nice thing to do, but slowly but surely things started to happen. We had people like Lawrence Dallaglio who was got stung by the newspapers so we helped out with some legal expenses there. As the game began to mature and have significant HR issues and contractually issues and fallout we are still seeing it today. The need and the absolute essence for a strong players association became more and more and clear. So about 2-3 years into it we got some basic funding for the rugby union and the clubs to help support us. Then over the next 10 years we have grown in



stature and in influence and weather it has been something as catastrophic as a serious injury or something as profile as Bloodgate, we have had some drug issues with one of the clubs in the west country we try to be that common sense line around of what we do in the game and against the background club vs. country with a lot of disputes between the two stake holders. We try to be the voice of common senses. So that is how it all came about really it was absolutely on the back of an injury that happened to me. That motivated me to do something about it.

**Would it be fair to say there was not set a set structural mechanizes for athletes to go to if injured?**

No there was nothing there

**So when a player like yourself got injured, ties where cut, figure it out on your own?**

There were still contractual obligations. Some clubs are far better than other clubs. But other clubs would see it as an opportunity to get rid of that player and say, I think it was 12 weeks in the original standing contract , so after three months, and as everyone knows 3 months is one injury.

**Was there any difference of when the clubs were owned by committee opposed to one individual owner, did the switch change how player welfare was address?**

Not really, well in fact the individuals probably brought more security around rugby, unfortunately rugby be still has a run by committee ethos but the individual or the 'sugar daddies' as an expression brought more cohesion . Ironically you have 12 people, 10 people at the time, who own clubs. Who all made lots of money doing their own thing paddling their own canoe. On the back of that they came into a heavily regulated environment such as rugby full of the old farts full, of the duffers who are all very Victorian in their outlook. So there is a huge clash about how things should be done. And in a way we had a threat, when it became professional the issue Kerry Packer was getting involved Murdock was getting involved real power struggle of getting players... you fear if Packer had his way

and got rid of all the Unions paved the way for a much slicker working environment but you still have a lot of the outdated practices of the working committees that go on now currently across the world.

**I want to go back a bit too when you were talking about the contracts and the whole package of welfare that you provide. How would you define player welfare, what does that mean to you?**

I think player welfare is putting the player first across decisions that are made, Um you know a lot of people in rugby play lip service to player welfare. They sort of say, because in a way I think players need to be protected from themselves. Particularly in an environment which is machismo very contact oriented. A lot of players I believe would play every day of the week if they could. Because that's the sort of bravado that exists and where we have defiantly seen a change in that over the last few years players are inextricably finely tuned athletes now. But because of the contact nature of the game they are caring knocks, players do not want to see, or don't want to miss the opportunity or have someone else come in and take their place. So I think, for me player welfare is insuring that the right decision is made, for that, and it is player based individual that the right decision is made for that player to perform at the best of his ability at the regular intervals which are required across the length of a 40 week season.

**Going on to the injury side, was the benevolent fund apart of the original plan. Was there a natural progression, was it in the game plan from day one or did something significant happen which created a call for action?**

Looking at other sports we were always we were always looking for key drivers. So the Benevolent fund was one, player development and education was another, insurance pretty much came out at the outset of beginning of the RPA. From the perspective, there was an injury to one of our athletes in 2000 – 2001. Andy Blyth suffered a serious spinal injury and that was the trigger that we actually need to start physically donating and generating revenue on behalf the players there were injured.

**Was that triggering Andy? Was it fans?**

I think it was Andy really, I think it was March 2000 when he picked up his injury. It was absolutely a specific incident where everyone was like “oh my god” this was now real, this is happening. The reaction from the Rugby Family, if you like, was very strong. Several owners like Nigel Ray were very supportive of Andy in helping him recover. Our sort of view this almost crystallized to us what we (RPA) are all about. People today think we are a charity, but we are not. But it is a very important part of what we do; it is a public reminder, the fragility of any sporting career particularly in a high impact sport like rugby.

### **Was Andy the first catastrophic injury post professional Rugby?**

Yeah he was, he was. I believe he was. In England, there was Quinn Jones in Wales. We were not involved in Wales and we are not involved with Wales. Andy was probably the first professional causality of that sort of catastrophic injury. If you sort of chart it, there were about 3 to 4 of us in 94-95 that suffered serious injuries we were fortunate we had insurance in place. We had taken a very professional approach. Interesting aside I was talking to a girl friend of mine lived with up at St Andrews, she was an American. She is from Kansas. The first question she asked when we talked about it, was where you insured? I was like my god that is interesting; I asked why she asked that. She was like that’s what you do in the states you insure yourself. And that is such a different outlook. Here is like are you ok? It struck me as a very interesting cultural difference even now our players today still do not do top up insurance. So they get a standard package for being a pro but they do not invest in anymore. We just ask as that question constantly culturally. We keep telling the guys you need to take care of yourself, and we cite people like Andy or Matt Hampson which is very high profile causality. So I guess Andy was the trigger, which made me think we actually need to start. We did not have much money in those days, I guess 1998 – 2001 was the first time we actually made some type of donation. That was when the benevolent fund actually started that was the first opportunity to physically give cash out because we did not have enough to run the operation.

### **How does the Benevolent Fund fit into the overall picture of the RPA? Current and future-**

It is a significant. It is one of one of the three key areas in which we work in. I would say it is almost the flagship of what we do. I think this is why we do get mistaken for a charity. I feel the benevolent (inaudible) with the BF is has given us a great opportunity to tell stories that would not get told about players who might not be catastrophic but players who have not been able to adapt to life after rugby. Hardship through illness or injury and I think it is a real significant part of what we do, and if I was to be honest we probably have not done as much with it over the past several years. Matt is a great, Matt Hampson is our ambassador, and one of the things we are trying to do more is around him, telling our story. When we sit down and tell people our story they say wow that is amazing. It started from here, now we are here, look at this. But we also have not been very aggressive about getting donors on board or getting patrons or people who put money into the program. I guess the third part of it is we don't know longer term or long term impacts of rugby. I have a massive issue, we reading up a lot on the NFL and the issue of dementia. My fear is ten years down the track we are going to have a lot of players hobbling along with no knees, no hips you know. How can the game generate enough awareness around that without putting people off? Candidly, people look at rugby and they say so many neck injuries actually in comparison we are very low to horse racing / riding and stuff like that. So yeah so that is a big issue, who do we get our story out there more. Particularly around some of the stuff that is not that is high profile.

**With that you read the reports of the players getting bigger – faster- stronger and you mentioned where people are going to be 10 / 15 years down the line. Rugby World stated that 20 players were forced to retire this year because of injury. What does that mean? What is the reaction to that from the perspective of the RPA?**

I think it is a very short term philosophy for a lot of our players. We can talk to them until we are blue in the face about insurance what can happen about transition. I think a lot of guys' quite invert quite insular about it. They are aware of it but you cannot let that affect your performance. It is the accumulation effect is what we are worried about, we just completed a medical survey A lot of the

comments are “I want to be able to run around with my kids when I am 40” would I be, who is going to pay for my hip operation of my knee” these types of things.

**So they are aware?**

Yes

**A lot of the language you use, you don't hide the fact – you use Welfare, injury. Is that a very conscious effort as well?**

One of the things we are good at is telling it as it is. Players really appreciate the truth, I remember my days as a player the worst director of rugby was a guy who never told me the truth. He would tell me one thing and do another. I think players want to know. That is an important thing from my point of view. As there spokes people, we are just giving the facts to them as best we can.

Commodification of the athlete- with the advent of professionalism, the bigger/faster/ stronger athlete arms war that has been created. Player interest in contract and sponsorship agreements how does that play within addressing welfare. The balance?

I think this is very interesting because I think they are very much intertwined, joined at the hip. I think if you get the playing structures right, the commercial element will follow. If you look at the NFL it is obviously different in the franchises and pooling of rights and collective bargaining agreements. My view if you get the playing structures spot on then the rest falls into place. So whether you got, one the biggest issues is our stadiums are not big enough to generate the revenue we need to reduce the season to create better product to put more people there, to put less stress on the athletes. So that is one thing, it is almost like a capital expenditure is needed to invest and the next questing is will people come watch rugby, and I think the answer is yes. We rely so much of the world cup and sort of a watershed year. If England can get to a semi-final or final it is a better place for everyone. I think the linkage between welfare and commercial is an interesting one. We need to look at the game, previously players 40 games a season going on summer tour going on Lions tour.

This is the Dallaglio generation where the guys were built of granite probably could do it; I don't think the guys these days could. One thing we have seen a real culture shift is around retention and recruitment of players. So clubs now understand it is far easier to develop and retain their own players than buy overseas or other players. The quality of the academy is something that needs to be addressed. You also go the issue of the off field activity of players. We use to, in the good old days players would knock seven bells out of each other five days of the week inaudible then play. Everyone understands now the issue of accumulation of injury, cannot do that now. When you want players to peak at certain times of the season you must be more scientific approach. Need to get away from the "my day theory" the well in my day this is how we did it. It is just the dark ages stuff. As sport science and technology grows around the athlete and the investment in the athlete grows this is where you start to see the differences in the good teams and the not so good teams. Ultimately it is a truism, the world cup and the international team represents so much how the rest of the game develops unlike football. It is almost like a polar opposite of soccer. Everyone talks about England. If you talk to a rugby fan, they say they are a fan you ask them what club they support I really just support England. You ask a football fan they say of I support Chelsea. There is more of National interest than there is about the clubs. Club game has grown significantly in the last few years. The really interesting piece in rugby I think is the European element. The European cup the Amblin Cup you have that national pride, you have that local pride and you got that, why I think players love it the most you are playing in a quasi-international stage with your club mates rather all England. So and interestingly, I think I am correct in saying the European cup generates the most money, not like champions league in football but it defiantly generates the most money over the fewest weekends. There is a real passion around look at the model is European competition which is spread out over the season which I don't think is sustainable but certainly look at ways of getting the best players in Europe playing against each other more regular. I think that would generate more interest and more capital.

**When you look at Sarsens – they invest in the welfare of the athlete and do very well on the pitch, what does that mean? Does that translate to other clubs? Is the RPA and BF still the key player, will clubs start addressing the issue of welfare themselves as they see it as a benefit to club and performance?**

Good question. First of all I think it is brilliant what the sari sans are doing. David Priestly has done a great job there You speak to players there and players who have been around the block and have seen lot of different rugby environments, all of them are pretty much the same, this is the best rugby environment they have been in because the rugby is not a side show but it part of the whole rather than just the whole thing. I think it is almost, back in the day of ratio physic or strength and conditioning to players. 1 to 15 or 1 to 12 again looking at the NFL and it is the clubs that can invest in those areas I think you can see a great difference so if you track the last 10 professional years WASPS and Leicester over the early part of those 5 – 8 years. Leicester has a phenomenal training facility. Wasps have a different approach which is very adult in as much as Warren Gap would send the fellas off for a week on their own, don't come in this week, see you on Thursday for training and it became so apparent that those guys thrived on being empowered to their own training, look after themselves because if you showed up on a Thursday and you had not done your training or you had been on the piss all week you would stand out like a sore thumb. There was such a sense of responsibility that was given to them in what were pretty normal surroundings but the number of strength and conditioning coaches they really felt special. I think you are seeing that with Sari sans to a different level with employing their own welfare officer, own player development Manager. That sort of sport psych, but also all the other things they are doing for players. They are losing a lot of money doing it but the return on the field in phenomenal I think this whole piece is going to be the next sort of battle group for clubs because we have just done a tour of all the clubs and there is a number who have invested heavily into the training facilities. Players are showing up feeling "footballer's" they are like my god, isn't this amazing what a great place to work. I think that is reflected very well. The Quinn's who are currently at the top of premiership is in that space, with

world cup people are away, but quins are looking very good and when you go around the clubs you can sense how they feel about the club, the loyalty in general. I think this whole player development / welfare side is going to be the next point of difference. Clubs are going to look at scaricins and go this is actually working and if player is happy off field they play better on field and there are loads of correlations that anecdotally we have drawn. There is an AFL study going on in Australia, the players association trying to draw up some data on off field activity on field performance. There is just sense that this is the next stage, and it happened in other sports around the world. Australia has their own providence, New Zealand have their own providence. We have that working for us; we love to have one per club. TO be honest even if the clubs employed them it would not bother me that much because at least they are taking care of this. The issue comes around independence and would you. For example, we have had conversations with players at Saracens, would you open up fully to their club, would they feel conflicted that they would not want to share that might get shared. We will have conversation with other players at other clubs that will be totally independent and confidential.

**Off that do you think having the RPA and the BF the athlete is more willing to say they are hurt that they need help. Does the existence of a third party help athletes address issues of need that they would not normal go to a club for help?**

The BF tends to step in when players are retired or when destitute or out of contract still at a club. By in large players are well looked after, there are a couple of clubs who are poor employers. In fact they are losing a lot of players. They cannot, they are favourite in relegation year after year. They are not investing enough in the ambition and the sort of support they give the players. But particularly around the BF, tends to be more those who have retired or recently retired who we interact with because that tends to be – it tends to be a point of last resort. We have a process where players are means tested for example if and England player who recently retired who was earning 400,000 a



year came along asking for some money for a knee operation, frankly he can afford that. Actually really for the guy who retired 10 years, needs a hip operation is working on a building site.

Currently we have reserves of ½ a million pounds. And the issue, it sort of the doomsday scenario, what happens when we need to do something quickly.

### **Sort of insuring yourself?**

Yeah – that is the next the big piece for all of us, we currently spend 750,000 pounds a year on insurance with the clubs, RFU and ourselves in a collective. The main focus is; is this money well spent are we better off self-insuring? Put it in a mutual fund; correct a few issues around decline players which would be an issue for us. So it is an issue for us is this a more cost effective way of doing this. Yeah so yes. Particularly for the players who are down on their luck, sick or something with their family. We had a guy whose daughter passed away from leukaemia she was 3 ½ trying to look at different ways we can help but also be a cross, I guess be sensitive that some players have tremors pride and don't want to be seen as receiving a hand out. Need to work in the most effective way, maybe something like counselling we can provide for a player who is injured out of a game. I can speak from personal experience, when I had to retire at 27. The hardest part was not the physical side but the psychological trauma that came with it, the self-esteem issues. My brother is a psychiatrist, and I talked to him a lot about this, not at the time but subsequently. I was in hindsight; I was depressed but at the time did not understand what was going on, I was just so miserable. And then I went to see Andy in hospital, that would have been in 2000 and so that would have been 4 years after my injury and meet subsequent people in the interim and realize how lucky you are. It is a real bench mark and then you met guys like Matt Hampson and Augustus mandible it is a real sense of perspective of your lot compared to other peoples.

### **Want to share anything about the fund – how it makes you feel?**

We always say here – we now have gone from my front room in Fulham 13 years ago to 17 people working here. 6 Based regionally, we have 2 seats on the major board of the game, and we made

significant progress. The interesting piece for us, nationally that longer term prognosis, where and how can rugby help going forward? The RFU has its injured players foundation who take care catastrophic injury we take care of the professional they are sort of the amateur we are the professional. A lot of our work now is how we define how we sit, where we sit with both groups and how we communicate that to the game, that is something that has not happen.

**Is there a lot of confusion between the two organizations?**

Quite a lot yes. Absolutely. I think generally in rugby it seems to be a busy charity space. One of our roles is to represent the commercial rights of the all England team in negotiations with the RFU. So when (inaudible) do you have a charity you support, we would love if it was ours but if there is a personal reason someone wants a different charity let's work together. It seems to be quite cluttered trying to find the messaging quite important. SO that is sort of the national play. The other is international play so I am off to New Zealand a week from tomorrow for semi and finals, and you have a lot of these 2<sup>nd</sup> tier nations playing in the world cup who don't have the infrastructure or support and Union level or player level but there is injury happening there, why is not the international rugby board looking to help them, why are they not putting aside money to research projects

**So there is more of a focus international on the bigger Unions?**

We have 8 player Associations around the world, England, Ireland, Wales, France, Argentina, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Effectively. Ironically are all the quarter finalists at the World Cup.

**That is an interesting correlation.**

Absolutely. Had not thought about that that is very good. One of the things we said as a collective group is how do we talk about the longer term issues; contract, welfare, injury and try to get across the IRB who are by definition very chaotic organization, whose practices again, off the record, whose practices are steeped in 20<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century and we are trying to pull the game kicking and

screaming into the 2015 world cup. Massive issue how we can get that message across the game at large we are there to support and help. So that is one of the things I am going to work on when I am in New Zealand.

**Is there a battle of that tradition, of the Tom Brown School boy days to what rugby is today?**

Yeah (said in a very reflected manner) It is really William Webb Ellis meets Dan Carter. It sort of cultural fit of rugby is changing, and yet the people who are making the decisions of the game are steeped in 1960's 1970s rugby. In respect to them, if you sit around the table of the international rugby board I think very few would have an actual grasp of what is happening in modern professional game.

**Still champions of the amateur game?**

Oh yeah there are still those who would love the game to go back to amateur. Almost like King Canio they want the tide to stop right there. Let's turn back the clock, say "wasn't it wonderful in the good old days when..." It is almost, one of the things are discussing now is the fit for purpose around governing bodies.

**Explain that?**

One on the issues we have with the RFU for example on one had they are the governing body of the game in England on an amateur and professional level. On the other hand they are the disciplinary function of the game in England and thirdly they run the commercial entity which is Twickenham and the England Rugby team. They offer a huge admin function, so there are 4 to 5 major strands to the organization, similarly to the IRB and the World Cup it is almost like we are saying that is fine we accept your providence as the governing body, but in terms of quality of people, purpose delivery are you actually doing them up to standards and how are you accountable and who are you accountable to? So this summer has been littered with stories about the RFU and the CEO got sacked after 9 months in charge, which there has been a massive back lash against the people who sacked

him. And I just wrote a report to the board, if a player would have acted like some of those guys on the field he would be dropped and his contract would not be renewed, that is putting it in the most basic of terms. I think that's where we are right now, just asking the questions. Is the RFU fit for purpose? It is very governmental in approach. Is the RIB fit for purpose, what is their accountability, what are the checks and balances, who are they accountable to? We just feel as a player group, again looking at North American Sports and the issue of collective bargaining, as key stake holders we are just asking where are we in all of this, how do we fit in all of this. As you can imagine there is some chap. Some mythical gin and tonic sipper in a committee room somewhere blowing out of his ears "how dare they ask who I am and what I am all about". Rugby Union world cup is the third largest sporting event behind the World cup and the Olympics and we are just saying it is fantastic what they have done and world cup 2015 will be the most commercial successful world cup ever. The question just being asked right now is do we have the right people running it right now? Where is the accountability around it and who is involved in the decision making? Candidly the people sat around that table may not be the best informed or most capable in making the decision that is right for the game going forward. That is where the players frustrations are brought out we just believe we need more of a say. Even if we sit at the table and they tell us to piss off that is fine, we just want to be there that's sort of, and this goes across everything, Benevolence, welfare, scheduling, commercial we just think it is inefficient.

**Do you think that is more of a concern with current player opposed to the players in the amateur days? IS there more of a concern about the operations of the team.**

World cup start 87, First professional world cup was 99. I have always been fascinated by sports business it just really floats my boat. If you looked at 95 that is when it first went pro and there was a lot of interest around the players. Because there was an opportunity to make money being a rugby player. Suddenly everyone is interested and into it. I think the two areas we come back to are the

commercial and the scheduling. Players now have an interest in both. One is a bi product of the other.

**Is that the natural progression of the athlete or structural change that occurred in rugby?**

I think it is the natural progression of athletes. In one sense, it is an interesting paradox. Rugby is this diverse environment, when I was playing you would have Doctors, Lawyers, students, dentists farmers all in the same room. The great joy of those days, I sound like my dad, but you had such diversity in the dressing room and someone would talk about the day they had in the office or on the farm, a life experience, you would share and understand and enjoy. Now it is very 1, 2 dimensional. Pretty much training, sleeping family, so there is not that same breath. I think for by definition players are much more interested in what is happening to their career in rugby how that is being affected by decision makers as and there is an absolute impact on their bottom line based on the decisions that are made at the top table if you like. I think they are aware of what is going on. To my previous point so you had this diverse mix of players, most who have been public school educated , University educated, and on and on and on. Now you have guys who are 18 not going to University so it is bit of a generalization, but half the players are in higher education than it was 10 -15 years ago. That is changing, coming back up again, clubs are recognizing it is important for recruitment and retention of players. Keep the guys stimulated.

**When you talk about the cultural shift of the retention and recruitment of players is that something that has been suggested to them or something they have self-discovered?**

I think through our program. It is really interesting; the overseas players who come in and experience the player development program or elsewhere are into it like that. Who is my player development manager? I am here for two years, especially (Inaudible) are very very good, they know they are here for a short period of time and they got make it work for them as much as they can. Who is my player development manager; this is what I want to do, dial me in. More often than not a lot of them end up with good jobs, staying over here twice 3x 4x longer than their playing days

because they have organised themselves and identified the opportunity. The home grown guys are a bit more lackadaisical. Younger ones are getting better, the older ones are like I don't give a shite and then something will happen, they get injured or they don't get their contract renewed and suddenly they are in this uncharted waters of the real world. Terrified on the back of it. I think the player development Recruitment /retention issue is ... since there is more of a global approach coaching staff some are seen more overseas, some see it as more important, and for an investment of 50,000 a year, in a salary cap for 4.5 million is nothing. They are like we should be doing this, this is really important. So this discharges the playing staff to get on with it, they don't have to worry about the pastoral bit. Again so that is an important part of it. Look, with all over our guys, the biggest frustration they will engage with players, players will fall off the radar, come back in a few months saying really need to get on with that. It is trying to get that traction with them get that stickiness of what it is. We even say to a player even when you work out what you don't want to do that is a really big progression. When you do need to make that transition. But to say saresys (saricinas) 80% are involved with off field activity or studying. Some of the other programs, quins are getting a lot better. Their director of rugby is all over it. I think with that different generation of rugby, who been there, done it seen it, and realize what can be done complementary skills get with club sponsors. When we talk to commercial teams, if a player is better if they are capable of going in to a box and talking something that isn't rugby and btw what a great opportunity to meet these people because you are a rugby player. The strength and ties with networking, the light bulbs are starting to go off, I tell them this is costing you nothing and actually going to develop a deeper relation with your sponsor. We teach the guys networking skills; even it is as basic as starting or leaving a conversation. The good guys stand out like a sore thumb because they get it, they are into it, they are collecting business cards, they are sharp. The less engaged it is such a bore to do box duty after a game or talk to sponsors. It is such an opportunity to meet someone. It is trying to get that development theory or culture into clubs at several different levels.

**Do you see anyone that has that level of development theory in other sports?**

One key thing for us in the benevolent perspective and the welfare perspective is the actability of the players. You could go into a bar with some of these guys and they converse back. In football you don't get a shite, you are earning 150,000 a week you don't need to. Our average salary is 85,000 90,000 a year. And in football is it about 35,000 a week in the premiership. This is an absolute correlation between television revenues.

**If that money was infused into rugby do you think you would get that same bi-product?**

We are defiantly seeing a different outlook from players now who enjoy the celebrity. IN many ways you cannot blame them. There is a sense it is harder and harder to be grounded. I think in the same breath, rugby has an advantage rugby has over football in a binary sense that if one thinks you are getting ahead of yourself some one is just going to stick one on you. Put you down like a sack of spuds teach you a lesson. There universal langue of violence that keeps fee on the ground. But I think cultural you have different regions, you have different clubs who have different outlooks. London clubs will have a different outlook from Newcastle club. That is sort of a football worshipping part of the world. The one place Johnny Wilkinson could live pretty much anonymously was Newcastle. If he lived in London, or anyone, who gives a toss, to be honest so does not matter. You speak to some of the England coaches and they make the point who think they are footballers. And have that sort of outlook. If you look at Martin Johnson's apologetic comments on what went on, we have seen a lot of worse in football but there is an element, and one of the things we said to the RFU and to the Clubs in a way it reinforces the messages we have been coming out with over the last five years around player behaviour. Is education programs, social responsibility all these things the RFU are not to fussed about the clubs sort of get. These things are coming up, we need to focus on the education and double our efforts and we need to do more here. That's when, that's the sort of image of the game risk that gets everyone one edge, and that is what absolutely has happened down in New Zealand. It is not like we told you so, but you cannot just sit back on your Loral's. We have to keep going on this and remind the players what we are all about what the game is all about. I think

we just feel that accessibility lose that USP. We don't have that commercial back up to be able to do it.

**Any particular stories come to mind about the Benevolent Fund – success or challenges**

Matt Hampson was an enormous challenge 1<sup>st</sup> true catastrophic accident. Andy Bligh had a catastrophic injury and recovered. Matt was never going to recover from it. And the likely hood matt will have a shorten life expedience due to his condition. I think the RFU acted appallingly funny it really reengaged me back to when I was injured on a much much much smaller scale. But the abdication of responsibility and the washing of hands of matt

**When Matt was injured that is when SPIRE was still an acting organization, correct?**

Yes, so this is 2005. They could not have played it worse if they tried. The chief exec of the RFU never ever visited or called or spoke to Matt Hampton who was an all-England under 20's player. Spinal dislocation can breathe without a ventilator. It was just gross misconduct as I saw it. That was frustrating for us we were able to provide some help it was a very very tough time for everyone in the game. The Leicester tigers were fantastic with him. We did what we could, you know just trying to help. And I think there are some smaller instances where we provided some support for players or their families. NAME SULALVATA Newcastle had a Brain Tumour he was 22 he passed away, very sad, again we provided some support for his widow and children. You just try to do as much as you can.

**When did you start to see fan participation within the benevolent fund?**

Came quite quickly, and this is on the back on not doing a lot of marketing. I have a board meeting next week and one of the things I was to do is spend a little money much telling our story, I don't think we do it near enough. For the sake of a small stipend we can get more awareness around what we do. We do the charity events, again that is a great hook to hang our hat on. With the fan that just became more and more tangible early on. People are like what we can do how we can help. Again



player are doing activities, I went cycling through the Pyrenees. Other guys have gone canoeing up the fjords of Norway. Barnes climbed Kilimanjaro. From that perspective it works really well. There is a great empathy with rugby players, from the corporate level a lot of people have played. People at the highest levels of corporate structures tend to have played rugby. So there is a sense of comradeship. But also the fans see what the guys go through on a day to day basis and the long term impacts. We are very lucky, we have some great supporters.

**With the change in rugby viewer demographics, do you see that as a good thing or bad thing for the BF and raising money?**

I don't think so; we have a broad view of support now. Typically we get more corporate support, they can afford it. We are always quite targeted in terms of support (inaudible) three weeks' time after the world cup get a few England boys there we have sponsors who pay for them to be there. Sunday times are covering, all that type of stuff. I guess we have a good spread of sponsors, I think our challenge is how we engage more with the fans. How can we provide opportunities for the fans to understand more of what we are about and do something with that? Candidly that does not generate as much money as a black tie gala event that generates 50,000 pounds fundraising. That's the challenge, I would say in terms of effort input and revenue output find to find the right balance. Particularly with the events team here. I think last year's awards dinner generated 6 figures terms of income. Which is fantastic, in an ideal world you would just do more and more of that. The thing is the players become more aware of their vulnerability or fragility they want to see the fund grow be it for them or their peers or ... I was watching something the other day on tennis and Boris Becker was talking. It was the US Open, he was talking about the prize funds and they were, Becker was talking about the former generation of player and how they helped grow the game which helped generate more money for the next generation of players. I thought it was a really good way of putting it all back together and the debt of gratitude from where the players started from to where they are now. I thought that was interesting around rugby even though there is no prize

money are rugby union world cup, the salary cap had gone from 3 mill to 4.5 million will probably go to 5 million next year. As the watershed of world cups happen there should always be I think reflective look of who has brought the game forward. So there for those player who helped develop the game may in well be supported by the benevolent fund going forward.

**Do you see that as one of the major missions of the BF going forward? Fund honouring those that came before?**

Yes very much so. Really I think that is so important, that heritage piece. Is really important.

**Do you think that commitment to the past players is something unique to your sport?**

I not sure unique, I am sure other sports do it. It is a piece we. There is a play around this. We need to do more about those who have gone before making the feel they are still a part of the family. Even though you have moved on. Even since the 13 years since I have retired, a lot of those in my peer group have martin is managing the England team; Lawrence is doing great stuff on TV. There people who you play with that you forget about have not seen them in ages. Multiply that by 12 clubs it is really important that we have a mechanism by with the older players feel they are still involved or feel that they can get some form of support going forward. I just think it is important part of rugby. I would not have gotten as involved as I did if I had not watched the 101 great tries of 1960's or 70's watching those giants of old. I think that is important to just keep ticking over.

**That is still a progression of the welfare?**

Yeah I think that is a big part. I look a lot at what the PFM or the NFL and look at what they have done. Not necessarily as defined as a pension program but it is having that pot to pay for a hip operation or some support family support, education grants, whatever it is. We need, we are already, but more publicly. We are getting ready to launch an alumni medical fund which is all about: if you are struggling with injury the alumni medical fund sets within the benevolent fund and we will help you play for your operations again we have to be conscious of limiting it at the moment.

Discretion of the trustees. We can help you, come and apply. We then want to create a really active alumni to keep involved and in that way they can bring in work experience career advice, mentoring, and networking opportunities create that connection will be beneficial to everyone.

**With Rugby becoming professional late, do you think that has aided, hurt addressing the issue of welfare?**

I think the welfare issue came up the agenda issue very quickly just by the definition of the contact nature of the game, and we saw career ending injury, rugby has always had its injuries. Rugby has always taken care of its own, it has a good history on when someone is injured or ill the game rallies around and raises money with a dinner or something. It had to come up the agenda quickly because of issues like insurance. Protecting the assets, everyone was quiet aware in the first two years protect the assets became a massive play a lot of money was invested in to those insurance programs. That was probably the main point. Rugby coming late to professionalism, I don't think impacted massively. It was more of the game aware of it's of the physicality, players becomes fit, bigger, faster - sport because collision based than grace and skill and all that type of stuff. The accumulation and rates of injury grew quite significantly in the first few years. It is probably petered off a little bit. The data and detail we are getting back is getting better but u just feel players still think they are bullet proof as I did as everyone in the interim did. You can run through a brick wall at 25 and it is only the occurrence of catastrophic injury or we say to the player at the beginning of the season during the road show that we did: one player per club will have to retire due to injury. And before the season even started 3 had gone, are now at 25% of what we thought. So therefore look after yourselves there for get insurance but you are also dealing with people who may not take in the fuller picture. There I go again sounding like Dad. Just make the guys aware of the pitfalls of what they may be doing. Players sign the contract and they are like WOW. We have new player induction day in Aug. We went in first thing we said was congrats it was like the apprentice, good job you are here, now we are going to tell you all the shity thing about rugby. Sorry we have to do this

now, but in order for you to make an informed decision you need to know this now and going forward. When any player says thank you, it is a big shot in the arm for us. I think when you are helping out with the benevolent fund at any level we just want to sue them up give rapid response and give the best you can for their situation.

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